

**PARENT INVOLVEMENT IN EDUCATION AMONG AFRICAN AND CARIBBEAN  
BORN IMMIGRANTS IN SASKATOON**

A Thesis Submitted to the College of  
Graduate Studies and Research  
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Master of Education  
In the Department of Educational Administration  
University of Saskatchewan  
Saskatoon

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## **Abstract**

The difference in educators' and immigrant parents' definition of parent involvement has led to the view that immigrant parents are less involved in their children's education than native parents from the middle class (Crozier & Davies, 2005). The purpose of this study was to understand the experience of three immigrant parents born in Africa and the Caribbean with parent involvement in their children's education at the elementary level.

This phenomenological study utilized semi-structured interviews to gain a better understanding of the various ways in which immigrant parents are involved in their children's education, and the factors that influenced how they became involved. The findings revealed that the essence of the parents' experience of involvement in their children's education was maintaining nurturing relationships. Participants guided their children into a relationship with God, they cultivated a loving relationship with their children, and had a cooperative relationship with their children's school. The parents' experience is explored using the themes spiritual leadership, creating and nurturing relationships, and anticipatory socialization.

The description of the parents' experiences provides some insight into how immigrant parents view and enact their role in their children's education. The study also highlights how different cultural beliefs influence the ways in which parents contributed to their children's development. The parents were already making contributions in a variety of ways to their children's education. However, for the most part their activities were home-based and geared towards only their own children. There were opportunities for the parent to become more involved in ways that would extend to other members of the school community.

The implications of this study for practice are that educators should give an orientation to parents new to Canada about strategies they can use to incorporate school based involvement activities into their busy schedules. This will suggest ideas that parents may not have considered and could be effective in increasing their involvement on the school compound. Implications for future research include the need to investigate how culture delimits the ways in which parents become involved. There is also a need to explore what factors would motivate immigrant parents to become more involved in their children's education on the school site.

## **Acknowledgement**

I am grateful to my supervisor Dr. Janet Mola Okoko for her guidance and support throughout this research. Thank you for your counsel and encouragement through the challenging times on this journey. I am also thankful to my committee members for their help in improving this research:

- Dr. Dave Burgess, thank you for your assistance in the early stages of the research. Your advice was useful in helping to frame the parameters of the study.
- Dr. Warren Noonan, my committee chairman, I am grateful for your kind words and well wishes.
- Dr. Paul Newton, I appreciate your careful examination, insightful comments and the probing questions that forced me to consider issues that I had not thought of before.
- Debbie Pushor, thank you for your comments, suggestions and question which helped to improve the study.

Dr. Yolanda Palmer-Clarke thank you for sharing your experience in conducting phenomenological research with me and for your encouragement.

I extend appreciation to my participants Bill, Melinda, and Kavita for sharing your stories about contributing to your children's education with me.

Thanks to my parents, Ina, and Alex for your love and the opportunity to get a good education. I am grateful to my siblings Ann, Sue, Denease, and Junior for your encouragement and love. Ann thank you for always being there for me when I need you most. Also thanks to my aunts Pam, Bev, and Joy for your assistance.

Finally, thanks to Dianne, Coralee, and my other friends in Saskatoon in whom I found a fountain of encouragement and emotional support.

### **Dedication**

To my mother Ina, thank you for your love and encouragement over the years. You have been my teacher for as long as I can remember. You mean more to me than I can express.

Dad thank you for your support and the pride you express in all your children's accomplishments. I love you.

Aunty Pam, our second mom, thank you for staying with us and caring for us when we needed you.

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## CHAPTER ONE

Siedman (2006) asserted that “Research has autobiographical roots” (p.32). In other words, researchers’ lived experiences influence what topics they chose to study and how they conduct their investigation. This proposition is also reflected in the works of Creswell (2009), Hays and Singh (2012), and Lincoln and Guba (1985). In light of this, I highlight how certain aspects of my life may influence this research. I am an educator. I taught for approximately five years in Jamaica, four of those years were at the secondary level. There was always tremendous pressure for teachers to ensure that students performed well on standardized external examinations and internal tests. In listening to the discussions amongst Canadian teachers I realised that teachers here faced the same challenge. This led me to consider the rights and responsibility of the other constituents in the education system. Was the success of students only the responsibility of teachers? The family, and parents in particular, play a key role in children’s life. Consequently, parents came readily to mind as a stakeholder in children’s education. I therefore decided to focus on parents’ role in educating children and this prompted me to explore literature pertaining to parent involvement in education. Parent involvement as used in this study is all the ways in which parents contribute to their children’s cognitive, emotional, spiritual, moral, and physical development.

While conducting the review of the literature on parent involvement I began to appreciate the fact that there are multiple views about what constitutes appropriate parent involvement. Initially, I was looking at involvement from the point of view of an educator and all the shortcomings of the other stakeholders were apparent. As I read more studies I began to appreciate the fact that parents have their own views on what is adequate involvement. These views at times diverge from that of educators but are still valid. As such, in collecting and interpreting the data I was mindful of the potential bias towards the teachers’ perspective that I may have had and tried to “bracket” my experience as an educator (van Manen, 1997; Creswell, 2007). By bracketing my experience as an educator I mean I approached the research with an open mind and did not allow my experience as an educator to influence the process of data collection and analysis. I explain the process I employed to “bracket” my experiences in the subsection of Chapter Three titled “the epoche”.

Additionally, being an immigrant from the Caribbean, my personal experience with parent involvement amongst this group allowed me to understand the data collected in a way that someone who does not have that experience may not (Maxwell, 1998). For example, one participant was dissatisfied that her son was not getting as much work in class as he would have if he was in Jamaica. My experience growing up in the Jamaican elementary school system allowed me to understand what she meant when she explained that ‘back home children got a lot of work’. Additionally, my ethnic identity and status as an immigrant provided experiential data that were a “source of insights, hypotheses and validity checks” (Maxwell, 1998, p.78). This experiential data was not in the form of being involved as a parent in anyone’s education. However, I could relate to the process of selective assimilation that the participants’ seemed to be involved in due to their status as immigrants. By selective assimilation I mean that the participants had to negotiate what aspects of Canadian culture they would adopt for themselves and their children while trying to maintain the cultural identity of their country of origin. I found that my experience in navigating Canadian culture while retaining my Jamaican identity allowed me to gain an empathetic understanding of my participants’ experience in that previously mentioned process of selective assimilation.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aimed to address the need for more information and understanding about the involvement of immigrant parents in the education of their children. I investigated the experience of three immigrant parents in Saskatoon with involvement in their children’s elementary education. I used transcendental phenomenology as my research method. Phenomenology is the study of lived experiences (van Manen, 1997). Phenomenologists gather lived experience material such as stories and anecdotes as valuable sources of information that can help them to better understand what a particular experience is like for the people who have it (van Manen, 1997). Accordingly, my study was concerned with understanding what the experience of being involved in their children’s education was like for my participants.

### **Research Question**

What is the experience of immigrant parents born in Africa and the Caribbean with involvement in their children’s elementary education in Saskatoon? I used the following sub-research question to provide further direction for the study:

How are immigrants born in Africa and the Caribbean involved in their children's elementary education?

### **Background to the Problem**

Over the past six decades researchers and educators have studied and promoted family-school-community interactions and partnerships (Blackledge, 2001; Crozier, 1999; Doucet, 2011; Epstein, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2006; Lareau, 1987; McKenna & Millen, 2013). This emphasis on family-school interactions is driven by several factors which I explore in the subsequent paragraphs. First, there has been a shift from a closed system approach to an open systems approach in organizational theory (Scott, 2004; Shafritz, Ott, & Jang, 2011). This change towards an open systems approach impacts how social organizations, including schools, are governed. One effect is that educators see schools as influencing and being influenced by the other social institutions in the society, particularly the family (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Support for the open systems approach has continued due to research which shows that there is a strong relationship between parent involvement and the academic performance of students (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson, & Davies, 2007; Lawson, 2003). Students in schools with high levels of parent involvement perform better than students in schools with lower levels of such involvement (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

Second, in some countries, for example Canada and the United States of America, government policy requires parent involvement in schools. In Saskatchewan, the Education Act of 1995 made it mandatory for a board of education to establish a School Community Council for every school in its division (The Education Act, 1995). The School Community Council can comprise between five to nine members, the majority of whom should be parents or guardians of children who attend the school (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education). Similarly, the province of Ontario has demonstrated its commitment to involving parents in education by establishing a parent engagement office in the Ministry of Education to create and implement programs that encourage parent engagement (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010). In the United States of America programs such as Head Start, Follow Through, and Title I made it mandatory for parents who access the benefits of the programs to assist in getting their children ready to enter the school system (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Making parent involvement a compulsory

criterion for funding is an incentive for parents and schools to co-operate in the educational development of students.

Third, there is an increase in the number of mothers who are college graduates and therefore more confident in their ability to assist their children with their studies (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). These mothers have progressed through the different levels of the education system and that experience has given them the knowledge and self-assurance that they can guide their children through their schooling as well.

Fourth, 21st century parents have more access to information about human development than in the past (Epstein, 2011; Epstein & Sanders, 2006). Information about childrearing is readily available in books, magazines, on the television, radio, the internet and other media. The media suggests strategies that parents can use to enhance their children's academic performance such as purchasing toys, books, or other resources. Also parents get the opportunity to hear the experiences of other parents and to learn the methods they used to support their children's learning.

Due to the recognition of the importance of parent involvement some jurisdictions encourage the involvement of all parents in the schools regardless of gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity or other demographic characteristics (Mckenna & Millen, 2013). As mentioned above School Community Councils are one means by which schools seek to involve parents in the school's activities.

Studies show that parents choose to contribute to their children's education in different ways based on their feelings of what role they believe they should play, their confidence in their abilities to carry out said role, and general invitations from the school and their children for them to become involved (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Additionally, research shows that parents from certain social groups are less visibly involved in their children's education in the way educators expect. Immigrant, ethnic minority, and working class parents are less involved in the ways educators expect because of time and monetary constraints, cultural differences, language constraints, and different perceptions about the appropriate role of parents in education (Carreron, Drake & Calabrese-Barton, 2005; Crozier, 1999; Doucet, 2008, 2011; Lareau, 1987; Lawson, 2003; Lopez, 2001). Further, Crozier (1999) and Doucet (2011) suggested that school policies and values facilitate the marginalization of some ethnic minority and immigrant parents.

For example, when schools have Parent-Teacher Association meetings only in the evenings and communicate with parents only in English, it prevents immigrant parents who work on shifts and who are not fluent in English from participating fully in school activities. Similarly, the way educators view immigrant parents has a tremendous impact on their efforts to have these parents participating in school life. For instance, if they are viewed as lazy and apathetic towards their children very little communication occurs between the school and parents (Crozier & Davies, 2006). As such, it is imperative that administrators and teachers focus their attention on these marginalized groups (such as ethnic minorities, immigrants, and the working class) since they are at a greater risk for non-involvement in school based activities.

Schools that have a high level of parent involvement tend to consider the views and needs of students and their families as priority (Lawson, 2003; Lopez, Scribner, & Mahitivanichcha, 2001; Murphy & Pushor, 2004). Research also shows that successful parent involvement requires parents and teachers to have similar views about the roles of parents in education (Lawson, 2003; Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; McKenna & Millen, 2013). However, the reality in many schools is that teachers and parents tend to have divergent, sometimes contradictory, perceptions on who is an involved parent (Blackledge, 2001; Carreon, Drake & Calabrese Barton, 2005; Doucet, 2008; Lopez, 2001). For instance, teachers want parents to volunteer in their classrooms (Shumow & Harris, 2000), while some parents believe they should visit the school only if they need to resolve a problem concerning their child (Lopez & Vazquez, 2006). In light of the divergent views of parents and educators on what constitutes acceptable parent involvement, educators can benefit from having a better understanding of parents' views and experiences regarding parent involvement in education (Doucet, 2011; Lawson, 2003; Pushor, 2012). Crozier (2001) highlighted the dearth of research into the relationship of ethnic minority parents with their children's schools. She also criticized educators for approaching parents as a homogenous group while ignoring the "complexity of needs, the roles that ethnic minority parents are playing or the constraints that impede their involvement" (Crozier, 2001, p. 330). Epstein and Sanders (2006) also made a case for more diverse studies on parent involvement at various grade levels, different types of schools in varied locations and "students and families from a variety of racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds" (p. 292).

This study is in response to the need for diversity in researching parent involvement. I investigated the experiences of three immigrant parents to gain an understanding of their experience of involvement in their children's elementary education. The findings will add to an understanding of immigrant parents' experience with involvement their children's elementary education.

### **Significance of the Study**

Saskatchewan is undergoing demographic changes which will influence how schools in the province develop and implement parent involvement and engagement programs. In 2013, Saskatchewan received 10,680 immigrants and immigration was responsible for 66% of population growth in the province (Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of the Economy, n.d). In 2011, ethnic minority groups formed 6.3% of Saskatchewan's population with the most populous groups being Filipino, South Asian, Chinese, and Black (Statistics Canada, 2013). Immigration was responsible for the increase in ethnic diversity and played a major role in the growth of the province's population. As mentioned previously, research shows that immigrant parents are less involved in their children's education in the ways educators expect (Carreron, Drake & Calabrese-Barton, 2005; Crozier, 1999; Doucet, 2008, 2011; Lawson, 2003; Lopez, 2001). Consequently, as the immigrant population of Saskatchewan increases it is important that educators place a sustained emphasis on integrating immigrant parents in the life of the school. This need for an inclusive parent involvement strategy is underscored by the research conducted by Mckenna and Millen (2013). They asserted that "teachers cannot successfully and consistently teach and develop children's potential without a flexible, culturally and socially sensitive framework for parent engagement" (Mckenna & Millen, 2013, p. 15). Since parents, especially those who are immigrants, are from diverse cultural backgrounds, it is important that the strategies for parent involvement and engagement are not based on assumptions but on communication with parents through various types of research.

There is need for more research on how parents contribute to their children's education in Canada, particularly research that presents parent engagement from parents' perspectives (Pushor, 2007). Pushor's call for more research into parent engagement in the Canadian context is illustrated by Nye, Turner and Schwartz's (2006) meta-analysis. This meta-analysis comprised 18 quantitative studies into parent involvement at the elementary level conducted



between 1964-2000. Only 5% of the studies were conducted in Canada, while 85% were conducted in The United States of America, and 10% in Britain. This study has provided an in depth description of how three immigrant parents contributed to their children's education at the elementary level. As such it may provide useful insights and an empathetic understanding of how immigrant parents contribute to their children's education. These insights may be helpful to teachers, school administrators, parents, and policy makers at the divisional level.

### **Delimitations of the Study**

This study presented the experience of parent involvement in education from the perspective of immigrant parents. The study was conducted in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada. I chose to delimit the study to Saskatoon because most immigrants to Saskatchewan choose to settle there (Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of the Economy, n.d). Therefore, the need to understand parent involvement amongst immigrants is greater there than in other towns and cities in the province.

I also considered time, financial constraints, and developing rapport with the participants during the data collection process. I did not have the financial resources required to travel to other parts of the province to collect the data in person. Thus, having participants who live in Saskatoon allowed me to collect data using face to face interviews. Face to face interviews helped me to build rapport with participants before and during the interview, thus making them more comfortable and willing to share their experiences. In addition, the fact that the participants were in the same city also reduced the travel time required to meet them to conduct the interviews.

I interviewed three parents. I acknowledge the importance of understanding the experience of children with their parents' involvement in their education, however due to the in-depth nature of the study I felt it was best to concentrate on the parents for this research. I did not interview participants' children and thus had no basis on which to give an account of their experience of their parents' involvement in their education. The study was phenomenological and as such I chose to have few participants to facilitate obtaining rich data and an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience with parent involvement. Given the limitations of time and monetary resources delimiting the study to three participants allowed me to devote

more effort into getting an in-depth understanding of how each participant perceived and carried out their role in their children's education.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study was limited by the fact that it was dependent on the participants' ability to be very introspective and reflective regarding their daily activities with their children. It required the participants to describe their experiences of contributing to their children's education in great detail, some aspects of which seemed so mundane that the participants sometimes did not readily appreciate their significance.

Another limitation was the fact that in comparison to other countries such as the United Kingdom and The United States of America, relatively few studies have been conducted in Canada on the topic of parent involvement among immigrants. Thus most of the studies reviewed were not based on the Canadian context.

### **Definition of Terms Used in the Study**

Children: Persons 18 years old and younger.

Education: The formal and informal ways in which the knowledge and skills are transmitted to society's members. This knowledge is transmitted by various persons in various places and contexts. In the case of children they may learn from various persons and institutions for example their family members, peers, the media and through schooling. Mascionis and Gerber (2004) define schooling as formal instruction under the direction of specially trained teachers (p.635). Both informal education and schooling are discussed in this study.

Family: *A family is a socially recognized group usually joined by blood, marriage or adoption that forms an emotional connection and serves as an economic unit of society.* Also older members assume responsibility for the care and upbringing of their natural or adopted members who are children. (Synthesis of definition by Little et al. 2014 and Collins Dictionary of Sociology, 1991. The italicized section is taken from Little et al. 2014 and the rest is taken from Collins Dictionary of Sociology, 1991).

Immigrants: Persons who have left their home country to settle in Canada. This study focused specifically on immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean.

Parents: Those with legal or quasi-legal custodianship, whether biological, adoptive or foster parents of a child. This term also includes other family members (uncles, sisters, grandparents) whose involvement may be important to the child (Henderson, 1986).

Parent involvement: All the ways in which parents contribute to their children's cognitive, emotional, spiritual, moral and physical development. This involvement occurs in various environments both on and off the school site and across the lifespan of both parent and child. (this is a synthesized definition based on the research of Doucet (2011), Epstein (2011), Lawson (2003), López and Vazquez (2006), and Moll, Amanti and Neff (1992). Epstein's (2011) work highlighted the contributions that parents made to cognitive development via activities such as helping with homework. Lawson's (2003) study made note of how parents contributed to their children's physical needs for adequate food, shelter and clothing. Other researchers such as Doucet (2011), López and Vazquez (2006), and Moll et al. (1992) emphasized parents' contributions to their children's emotional, spiritual, and moral development using strategies such as motivational talks.

School: A formal learning institution where instruction is given in particular disciplines.

### **Organization of Thesis**

This thesis consists of five chapters. In the first chapter, I outline the background of the study along with the purpose and relevant research question. In Chapter Two I review and synthesize the important literature related to this study. The research methodology and method are presented in Chapter Three. Chapter Four consists of the composite textual structural synthesis of the participants' experiences. The composite textual structural synthesis is a descriptive analysis of the participants' involvement activities and the factors that influence their choice of involvement. The final chapter, Chapter Five, comprise the analysis and discussion of information which are presented in Chapter Four, along with the implications of the study for future research, theory, and practise, and my reflection on the research process.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **Literature Review**

In this study, I aimed to address the need for more information about the involvement of immigrant parents in the education of their children. I explored the parent involvement experience of three immigrant parents in Saskatoon. In this section, I review the literature related to parent involvement to attain an understanding of the various factors that influence why and in what ways parents contribute to their children's education. I begin by explaining the types of literature I chose to include and my reasons for doing so. The second section of the review outlines the differences among the terms parent involvement, parent participation, and parent engagement. The third examines educators' views on parent involvement. Section four addresses immigrant parents' perception of their roles in their children's education. The latter part of the review presents the challenges immigrant parents face when they are involved in their children's education, opportunities for parent involvement amongst immigrants, and recommendations for improving involvement.

#### **Types of Literature Consulted**

My search indicated that there are more studies from the point of view of educators, and a greater need for research that gives a voice to parents. I consulted mainly qualitative studies because I was interested in the subjective views of parents about parent involvement and the meaning it has for them. For example, the 20 Latino parents in López and Vazquez's (2006) study saw their role as mainly passing on values to their children such as the importance of hard work. Other parents considered keeping their children from bodily harm as involvement. I also explored literature that highlighted the educators' perspective on parent involvement since I believe that a comprehensive understanding of school-family relations required a close examination of the meanings of parent involvement from the perspective of each constituency in the school community. This allowed for areas of overlap and divergence between parents' and educators' views about parent involvement to be easily seen and explored in more depth. Shumow and Harris' (2000) study conducted in five low income areas in the United States, and Lawson's (2003) study which utilized 12 teachers as a part of the sample exemplify studies that were instructive in this regard.

Most of the studies I reviewed focused on parents' involvement in their children's elementary education. Eccles and Harold (1994) asserted that parents tend to be more visibly involved in the ways educators expect at the elementary than at the middle and secondary school level (as cited in Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997). Thus, I assumed that whatever level of involvement was exhibited at the elementary level represented the most visible types of involvement.

Scholars such as Pushor (2012) have highlighted the importance of differentiating between the terms parent involvement, parent participation and parent engagement. Thus, I explore the differences between parent involvement, participation, and parent engagement in the subsequent subsection.

### **Differentiating Among Parent Involvement, Parent Participation, and Parent Engagement**

Pushor (2012) asserted that parent engagement means that parent knowledge and teacher knowledge inform decision making, the determination of agendas and the intended outcomes of their efforts for children, families, the community and the school. She emphasized the difference among parent involvement, parent participation and parent engagement. Pushor (2012) is unequivocal in her advocacy for parent engagement as opposed to mere involvement or participation and states that she "uses the term parent engagement consciously to differentiate it from notions as parent involvement or parent partnerships ..." (p.464).

I have developed a representation of the parent/school relationship based on Pushor's article "Tracing My Research on Parent Engagement: Working to interrupt the Story of School as Protectorate". In my schema parents' relationship to their children's school can be placed on a continuum based on the amount of power they have to influence decision making at the school. To the extreme left is parent involvement, in the middle is parent participation and to the extreme right is parent engagement. The extreme left represents a place where parents come on the school landscape at the invitation of educators and exercise very little power in the critical decisions taken at the school. The middle of the continuum represents a place where parents have a little more power and the implication is that they have a right to have a visible presence on the school landscape however they are still subservient to the educators. To the extreme right is parent engagement where parents and educators have an equal say in the critical decisions at

the school allowing for “power and authority to be shared by educators and parents, and the agenda being served to be mutually determined and beneficial” (Pushor & Rutenberg, 2005, pp. 12-13). Hence the further right parents are situated the more decision making power is acquired and the further left they are situated the less decision making power they have.

I have chosen to define parent involvement as all the ways in which parents contribute to their children’s education and no distinction will be made among parent participation, involvement or engagement in this study.

### **Educators’ Views on Parent Involvement**

The types of activities educators encourage as valuable forms of involvement seem to suggest that they believe one of the main goals of parent involvement is to improve students’ grades (Pushor & Murphy, 2004; López and Vazquez, 2006). The academic focus of educators’ views on parent involvement is highlighted in Epstein’s (2011) typology of parent involvement. According to the typology, parents’ involvement in schools can be classified in six ways: parenting, communicating with teachers, volunteering at school, learning at home, decision making and collaborating with the community (Epstein, 2011, pp.46-47). Educators view parents who exhibit behaviors that can be placed in these categories as involved (Crozier, 2007). Epstein’s typology is reflective of educators’ views on how parents should be involved in their children’s education but it is not entirely reflective of how parents conceptualize parent involvement. Lawson (2003) hypothesized that educators and parents define parent involvement in education differently. This proposition was based on his study of parent involvement in an elementary school serving a poor urban community located in mid-western United States. He used semi-structured interviews to gather information from 12 teachers and 13 parents. He theorized that most educators tend to have a school-centric view of involvement. This means that educators want parents to become involved on the school site or to engage in activities that are an extension or reinforcement of classroom activities at home. On the other hand, parents, while acknowledging school-based involvement, emphasized the ways in which they supported their children at home and in the community even if the support was not directly linked to academic achievement (Lawson, 2003).

**Parenting and supporting learning at home.** Crozier has conducted several studies about family-school relationships in the United Kingdom. Her research supports the proposition that educators have a school-centric view of parent involvement. Crozier (1999) conducted a study into parent-school relationship with a sample of 58 working class parents and 15 teachers in a school in England. The teachers in the study reported that they considered assistance with homework and providing enrichment activities for children to be the most valuable forms of parent involvement. This school-centric focus remained consistent in the other studies she conducted. For example, Crozier and Davies (2007) explored school-family relationships amongst Bangladeshi and Pakistani families in two communities in North East England. Their participants included 591 parents and children, and 69 teachers and youth workers. They concluded that some teachers wanted to ‘transplant’ their skills and experience to parents to help them become competent co-teachers. ‘Transplanting’ of skills meant that teachers would train the parents how to teach their children at home. This involved having parenting classes to show parents how to play educational games with children and perform other activities that would enhance and reinforce what the professional teachers did at school.

Researchers investigating educators’ views of parent involvement in the United States of America also found that educators thought of parent involvement in terms of activities parents could engage in to support and supplement their children’s learning at school. Shumow and Harris (2000) investigated teachers’ thinking and learning about parent involvement in urban elementary schools serving five low-income communities in the United States of America. The teachers in Shumow and Harris’ (2000) study reported that they expected parents to provide for children’s basic needs of food and clothing, provide materials for school, ensure that children attend school regularly, provide space in the home where children can study and do schoolwork with minimal disturbance, assist children with homework, read with them and engage them in enrichment activities such as taking them to libraries and museums and ensuring that children were taught to behave correctly and how to work with other people. Parents who do not get involved in the ways teachers expect are deemed uninvolved at best, and neglectful at worst (Crozier, 2007).

**Volunteering at school.** Studies show that educators value activities that parents perform on the school site and that support the work of teachers. Carreon, Drake and Calabrese-Barton (2005) explored the parent involvement experiences of immigrant parents in two elementary schools located in a mid-sized city in Central Texas, the United States of America. They utilized interviews and school observations to gather information from 17 immigrant parents, the principals and teachers. They found that teachers placed a high premium on parents volunteering. The most common roles they wanted parents to play were classroom volunteer, helping in the school office, supervising children on the school playground, fundraising, attending school festivals, helping in the cafeteria and participating in field trips as chaperones or as drivers. The studies conducted by Lawson (2003) and Carreon et al. (2005) supported Pushor's and Murphy's (2004) view that teachers define parent involvement as either a way of supporting student academic achievement or in terms of participation at school initiated functions. However, many immigrant parents may not meet educators' expectations in this regard (Crozier, 2007).

**Communicating with teachers.** Educators wanted parents to correspond with them about students' performance and behaviour. They expected parents to do this by attending parent-teacher conferences, speaking to teachers when they carried or collected children from school, speaking to teachers over the telephone or via emails and letters (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Shumow & Harris, 2000). Teachers felt that this would help parents to keep abreast of school events and to engender their support in addressing any behavioural issues their children were having.

**Decision-making.** The teachers in Shumow and Harris' (2000) study indicated that they believed parents should participate in school decisions in a limited way. Most teachers felt that parents should have a say in how funds are allocated, but should not influence curricular decisions, class placement for children nor the hiring of new teachers (Shumow & Harris, 2000). These findings suggest that this is probably the area where teachers are most uneasy about parents becoming involved. Decision-making requires teachers to share their power with parents, which some teachers may be reluctant to do.



**Collaborating with the community.** According to Epstein and Sanders (2006), parents are expected to make use of services available in the community to improve themselves and the lives of their children. As such, they are expected to make use of resources such as General Educational Development classes to improve their educational level so that they are more prepared to assist their children with their schoolwork. As part of their role of providing for children's basic needs they should know how to access appropriate healthcare for their children and be proactive, where necessary, in seeking government or charitable assistance to ensure that their children enjoy an acceptable standard of living.

### **Parents' Perceptions of their Roles in their Children's Education**

Lawson's (2003) study into parent-teacher perceptions of involvement in an elementary school serving low income families showed a key area of divergence between parents' concept of involvement and that of educators. The parents in his study viewed home-based activities such as protecting their children from danger in the community and getting them to school each day as types of involvement. However, teachers did not count this as involvement and saw it as parents fulfilling their basic duties. This is one example of the difference in how parents and educators conceptualize involvement. These differences in the perspective of educators and parents are potential barriers to parent involvement as parents may not feel valued by school officials. The problem is compounded when the parents originate from different societies and are culturally distinct from the dominant ethnic group in the host society. The divergence between educators' expectations and parents' capabilities is one challenge faced by some parents.

The studies discussed above (for example Crozier, 1999; Crozier & Davies, 2007; Lawson, 2003) show that educators expect parents to be involved in ways that are determined by the teacher and that improve the academic performance of the students. These types of involvement encourage parents to become very involved on the school site at the invitation of the teacher and to serve the agenda of the school. There is little scope for parents to influence decision-making at the school level in a meaningful way (Pushor, 2012). Other theorists such as López and Vazquez (2006) disagreed with Epstein's teacher-centered approach to parent and family involvement. They are among a growing group of researchers who advocate for equal

respect to be given to the multiple ways in which families pass on information, life skills and values to children (Carreon et al., 2005; Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992; Pushor, 2012). These researchers advocate for parents' definition and feelings about parent involvement to be given as much credence as that of educators. This study outlines both the teacher-centered view of parent involvement, which looks at the roles teachers believe parents should play in their children's education, as well as parent involvement from the perspective of parents.

Various researchers assert that there is a difference between educators' view of parent involvement and the views of some parents. Doucet (2008) conducted a study which explored how African-American parents understood their and teachers' roles in their children's education. She collected information from 25 parents in New York, North Carolina and Pennsylvania using semi-structured interviews. The information she gathered showed that the parents' viewed their role as preparing their children for life generally and not just to achieve good grades. Other scholars such as López and Vazquez (2006) refuted the position of researchers such as Epstein who proposed that there should be an effort to create more school-like families. On the contrary, they posited that there is a need to move away from school-based understandings of involvement and greater credence should be given to home-based pedagogical practices. Accordingly, they have conducted investigations into how parents define education and what roles they think they should play in their children's learning.

According to Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) various factors influence parents' involvement. Parents' process of role construction, parents' sense of self-efficacy, and general invitations for involvement determine how and why parents become involved. In other words, the social groups that parents belong to, their confidence in their ability to help and invitations from the school and their children to help influence the type and intensity of parents' involvement. Working class parents, for example, saw their role in their children's education in what some may argue are very basic terms such as ensuring children were punctual for school, keeping them safe from harm, feeding and clothing them (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Lawson, 2003). The study I conducted focused on immigrants, however this information on class is relevant as many immigrants also belong to the working class and face similar economic

and social challenges which could explain the similarities in their parent involvement level and practices. The subsequent paragraphs explore the roles parents play in their children's education.

**Ensuring children's physical well-being.** In a study investigating parent involvement amongst working class parents in England, Crozier (1999) used interviews to collect information from 58 parents and 15 teachers. The parents reported that they contributed to their children's learning by providing food for them as well as clothing. Parents in Lawson's (2003) study also considered providing food, shelter and clothing as involvement. These provisions helped to provide students with the basic requirements for human existence. The studies carried out by Crozier (1999) and Lawson (2003) and a meta-analysis on parent involvement conducted by Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) also indicated that parents considered keeping children from bodily harm as involvement in their education.

**Transmitters of culture.** The transmission of culture is another form of parent involvement that parents engage in. Doucet (2011) examined why Haitian immigrants in the Greater Boston area of Massachusetts did not display the parent involvement traits that teachers expected. After interviewing 54 parents of Haitian descent she hypothesized that the parents actively constructed and maintained discrete boundaries between home and school. These immigrant parents believed that teaching their children about religion, instilling values, and speaking to them about issues of race and culture was their responsibility (Doucet, 2011). They felt that schools promoted tolerance and acceptance of diverse lifestyles that may conflict with the values they taught at home. Doucet (2011) asserted that the low visibility of Haitian parents in schools in the United States of America was a form of resistance. These parents avoided close contact with school officials to protect their cultural identity and because they had ambivalent feelings towards the culture of the host society (Doucet, 2011).

López and Vazquez (2006) conducted a similar study into parent involvement amongst Latino/a immigrants in a mid-western American state. The 20 immigrant families they interviewed reported that parents viewed cultural transmission as their responsibility. Lopez's (2001) study of five families in The Texas Rio Grande Valley has also revealed that the parents used various methods to instil a good work ethic in their children. These methods included taking children to work on the farms with them to see how physically strenuous the work was.

They used the farm experience to encourage their children to work hard in school so that they could avoid doing manual labour in adulthood.

Evidence of parents teaching values and attitudes to their children was also revealed in Moll et al. (1992) research among 25 households of Mexican immigrants in Tuscan Arizona. They found that many parents did not assist in their children's education in the ways educators expected but they helped to instil the value of education in their children. This is also true of other parents from marginalized groups such as the Aboriginal community in Canada. Stelmach (2008) conducted a study involving five Aboriginal mothers in a Catholic school division in northern Alberta. She found that while the parents did become involved in some of the ways teachers expected such as assisting with homework, they also played the role of "cultural intermediaries" and "cultural guardians" (p.2). As a cultural guardian, the parents helped children to learn Aboriginal values and ways of life so that they could have a sense of pride in their ethnic identity. They taught them how to live off the land by whaling, hunting, picking berries, and other ways in which Aboriginal peoples have traditionally sustained themselves. Importantly, most of the mothers gave more priority to parents' role as cultural guardians than to becoming involved in ways educators expected. The mothers also believed that as parents they played the role of cultural intermediaries. This involved assisting their children to navigate the challenges of living within two cultures that had different worldviews: that of the dominant European culture in schools, and the Aboriginal culture in which they were raised. Thus by playing the roles of cultural guardians and cultural intermediaries the participants in Stelmach's study assisted their children to gain the education necessary to survive while developing a sense of self and identity.

The research of López and Vazquez (2006), Doucet (2011), Moll et al. (1992) and Stelmach (2008) seems to suggest that parents believed that they had primary responsibility for instilling values in their children. Teachers were seen as being primarily responsible for the children's academic development or learning (Doucet, 2011; López & Vazquez, 2006; Moll et al., 1992; Stelmach, 2008).

**Providing emotional support to children.** Findings from Pinder, Prime and Wilson's (2014) study highlighted the importance of the psychological support that immigrant parents

offer to their children. They investigated the influence of parental factors in the performance of 130 high achieving Black American and Black Caribbean students in a mid-Atlantic American State. One of the findings was that parental motivation played a critical role in the students' academic success. Parents provided emotional support to children by discussing their children's progress in school, encouraging them to set goals for themselves and telling them they had the capacity to succeed. Likewise, Codjoe's (2007) study of 16 students of African descent in Edmonton, Canada supported this finding while also highlighting that parents also helped the children to cope with social discrimination. Other research including Codjoe (2010), Martinez and Velazquez (2000) and López and Vazquez (2006) also highlighted how the emotional support immigrant parents provided for their children contributed to their academic performance.

**Advocates for Children.** The term advocate as used here refers to how immigrant parents presented the needs of their children to school officials and made decisions regarding schooling that they felt would be in the best interest of their children. Codjoe (2007), Crozier (1996), and Doucet (2008) asserted that immigrant parents often acted as advocates for their children by highlighting issues of discrimination. Parents sometimes felt that teachers held stereotypical views of their children that impacted negatively on children's achievement. Immigrant parents sometimes insisted that their children be put in different classes and challenged negative assumptions about children's intellectual ability (Doucet, 2011; Doucet, 2008). Parents enquired about school options from members of their extended family and community and opted to send their children to schools where they felt they would have better prospects (Carreon et al., 2005; Crozier, 1996).

**Complementing and compensating for the school curriculum.** Some parents also made decisions in the best interest of their children by compensating for the areas where they felt the formal curriculum or instruction was lacking. Lareau (2000) highlighted the important role that class played in how parents approached the school curriculum. She conducted an ethnographic study in two elementary schools in California. One school served working class families and the other served upper middle class families. Lareau conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 families, the two principals, two first grade teachers, and one special education teacher. She surmised that the working class parents reinforced the curriculum by

reading and practicing spelling with their children. Middle class parents also assisted their children with reading and spelling. However, they also compensated for curriculum shortfalls by teaching their children themselves or hiring tutors.

Similarly, Reay (1998a) conducted a study involving 33 mothers and three male partners who had children enrolled in two schools in London, England. One school had primarily working class children and the other had children from mostly middle class backgrounds. She stated that the Black mothers in her study enrolled their children in Black Saturday School to compensate for the lack of Black history in the British National Curriculum. They felt that these classes would help their children to appreciate their heritage, improve their self-esteem and allow them to overcome the challenges they faced as Black children growing up in a society where social discrimination based on ethnicity was common.

Other parents used more conventional measures to supplement the work of teachers. Diamond (1999) examined the educational beliefs and parent involvement of 10 low income Black parents in three schools in a mid-western city in the United States. The parents reported that they complemented the work of the school by reading with children, helping with homework and taking them to libraries.

**School and community volunteers.** There are also studies that highlight how parents from marginalized groups were involved in children's education on the school site and in the community. Diamond (1999) and Diamond, Wang and Gomez (2005) insisted on the importance of race as a key factor in understanding parent involvement amongst working class African-Americans in the United States. They posited that African-Americans utilized cultural resources that enabled family involvement in children's educational development. These included their religious involvement, extended family networks and communal child-rearing beliefs. The extended family network helped parents to compensate for limited time and monetary resources by providing persons who could take care of children while parents were at work, or participate in school life in lieu of the parents. Parents also volunteered at school and in community-based organizations (Crozier, 1996; Diamond, 1999; Doucet, 2008). Volunteering helped parents to broaden their social network and also improved their confidence and ability to organize themselves to effect meaningful changes on behalf of their children.

Studies conducted among immigrant parents in the United Kingdom and The United States highlight the fact that these parents are less involved in their children's education on the school site. However, Wong's (2015) study conducted in Canada contradicts that finding. Wong (2015) conducted a case study in a Toronto high school using mixed methods. She used questionnaires to gather information from 185 parents. This was supplemented by a follow-up semi-structured interview with 12 of the initial participants in the survey. She also interviewed six teachers regarding their experience with parent involvement with their students' parents. She found that new immigrants (those who had immigrated within the last three years) were more involved than established and non-immigrant families. Wong (2015) identifies four reasons for this: parents wanted to build their network, gaining new skills to add to their resume, learning the education system, and helping their children to get settled.

More information about the demographic characteristics of the parent sample in Wong's study would have been helpful. While Wong (2015) shares that her study was conducted at a school in which over half of the student population was Asian, one limitation was that there was no mention of the participant's social class. Thus, one has to speculate if class was an influential factor. It is possible that the social class of the immigrants could have influenced how they became involved. Canada's current immigration policy is geared towards attracting highly skilled and educated immigrants. Education and social class of immigrants may explain the difference between Wong's study and the other studies cited that were conducted in the United States of America and The United Kingdom.

Despite the differences in the conceptualization of parent involvement between parents and educators, parents exhibited some of the behavioural traits that teachers expected. They volunteered at school and provided enrichment opportunities for their children such as taking them to museums. They also contributed in other ways that were not valued as much by teachers such as acting as advocates for their children and providing for their basic needs. Parents encounter challenges when they are involved in their children's education. Immigrant parents may face unique problems, some of which are explored in the next subsection.

### **Challenges Immigrant Parents Face**

If one starts from the assumption that immigrant parents care about their children and want them to do well, then the obvious question is why do they not display the parent

involvement actions educators expect? The following section addresses the various challenges immigrant parents face in becoming involved in their children's education. The first challenge discussed is government policy, followed by stereotypes of ethnic minorities. The lack of cultural capital has been cited repeatedly as an important constraint on the involvement of marginalized parents, including those who are immigrants (Blackledge, 2001; Crozier, 2001, 2006; Lareau, 1987; Reay, 1998a, 1998b). Thus it is explored extensively in the final subsection of the challenges.

**Policies.** Government's and the schools' educational policy in terms of curriculum content and communication policy can make it difficult for immigrant parents to become involved in the education of their children. Policy is the set of actions government takes towards a particular issue. It can also refer to inaction on the part of the government (Cooper, Fusarelli & Randall, 2004). This definition of policy can be extended to the context of school leadership as well. For example, the lack of translators in some schools can make it difficult for immigrant parents who are not fluent in English or French to communicate with school officials about their children. Similarly, curricula that only present the experiences and worldview of the dominant ethnic group and class in society (White middle class hegemony) can be alienating and unexciting for children and parents from minority ethnic groups.

**Language policy.** Language is a critical communication barrier for many immigrant parents. Ladky and Perterson (2008) investigated schools that were considered as having successful immigrant parent involvement. Their sample consisted of 21 immigrant parents, 61 teachers and 32 principals in rural and urban K-8 schools in Ontario serving English as a Second Language (ESL) populations of 20% or greater. One of their finding was that the difference between the language of home and school was the greatest challenges to schools having a communicative relationship with parents. Therefore, the success of the schools studied was largely due to the measures they implemented to enhance communication with parents (Ladky & Peterson, 2008).

Unfortunately, not all schools are responsive to the challenges that language can present for immigrant families. The language policy of schools can constrain the ability of non-English or non-French speakers to communicate with school officials. Thus when schools choose not to



hire interpreters or bilingual teachers this is a policy in the sense that the school has made a decision not to provide the language support that is necessary for parents who are not fluent in the country's official languages to communicate with them. Such action or inaction on the part of educators limits the ability of parents who are not fluent in English or French to communicate with educators effectively. These parents do not feel confident speaking with school officials or attending school events such as parent-teachers' meetings because they lack confidence in their ability to express themselves in the official language of the host society (Carreon et. al, 2005; Crozier, 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Doucet, 2011; Lopez, 2001; Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). Teachers who routinely give children storybooks written only in English or French disempower parents who are not proficient enough in those languages to assist with reading. Blackledge (2001) conducted research about parent-school relations at an inner-city school in London, England. He interviewed 13 Bangladeshi mothers and three teachers and observed reading sessions at home and school. The study revealed that Bangladeshi mothers felt disrespected when teachers ignored their complaint that they could not read English and suggested they make up stories from the pictures in the books instead. These parents indicated that they would read with their children more if teachers sent home books written in both English and the official language of Bangladesh, Bengali.

In 2013, 72% of immigrants to Saskatchewan spoke English (Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of the Economy, n.d). This means that a significant proportion of immigrants, almost one third, did not speak English. In fact, only seven percent of immigrants to the province identified English as their mother tongue compared to 24 % who identified Tagalog (Ministry of the Economy, n.d). The other mother tongues in the top ten included Mandarin, Urdu, Punjabi, Chinese, Gujarati, Hindi Bengali, and Ukrainian (Ministry of the Economy, n.d). What is significant here is that all of these languages use a different alphabet, phonetic and grammar system from English. Even if the immigrants speak English it may be at a basic level and it may not be the language they speak at home, which has implications for involvement activities such as reading to their children.

**White middle class hegemony.** Reay (1998b) investigated the ways in which mothers were involved in their children's education and how race and class influenced that involvement. Reay interviewed 33 mothers and three of their male partners. The findings were based on data

gathered from two schools in London, England. One school was situated in inner-city London serving a substantial percentage of poor students and the other in an affluent community serving mainly middle class students. She found that school officials and government policy makers perceive and treat parents as a homogenous group (see also Blackledge, 2001; Carreon et al., 2005; Crozier & Davies, 2005; Stelmach, 2008). The roles school officials believed parents should play in education were based on White middle class values and negated the reality of other groups such as the White working class and Blacks. These findings are reiterated in the work of other scholars such as Blackledge (2001), Codjoe (2005), and Crozier and Davies (2005). This culturally hegemonic approach masked the complexity of the needs of ethnic minority parents and negated the ways in which they participated in their children's education (Crozier, 2001). Some parents do not get involved in school-based activities due to multiple barriers, some of which stem from the schools' insensitivity to their cultural needs. An example of a culturally insensitive school event is a wine and cheese night which excludes parents from some religions such as Islam, (Crozier & Davies, 2005).

Additionally, Reay's (1998a, 1998b) analyses of parent involvement amongst middle and working class mothers in England showed that Black parents were dissatisfied with the British National Primary School Curriculum since its content did not include Black history nor engender Black students' appreciation of their racial identity. Codjoe (2005) reiterated this view with reference to Canada. He posited that the Canadian curriculum "is at odds" with the experiences and aspirations of students of African origin (p.79). He theorized that this has resulted in many African-Canadian students feeling alienated from the school system. It is probable that the alienation felt by children is transferred to or shared by their parents which can result in less participation in school activities. This issue of student and possible parent alienation from the education system is one that warrants more in-depth investigation.

**Stereotypes about ethnic minorities.** Many immigrants are from minority ethnic groups and this poses an additional challenge to them becoming involved in their children's education. Teachers have negative stereotypes of certain ethnic groups (Crozier, 1996, 2001; Delpit, 2006). For instance, Crozier (2001) postulated that African-Caribbean parents in England were frequently ignored when trying to act as advocates for their children. She argued that these parents were seen as hostile to the school. Negative stereotypes may prevent teachers from

building amicable and collaborative relationships with parents. Thus, stereotypes have a negative impact on how parents who volunteer on the school site are integrated in the life of the school.

Additionally, Blackledge (2001) challenged the dominant view amongst British educators that Bangladeshi parents were uninvolved in their children's education. He posited that Bangladeshi women invested considerable time in teaching their children, Bangladesh's official language, Bengali, and in some cases Arabic. They also taught them traditional stories. He hypothesized that they were seen as less involved by educators because the education they were giving their children at home was not valued by British educators. In Blackledge's terms they had, "the wrong sort of capital" (p. 365). Had they been teaching their children English, the schools would have appreciated their efforts. It is important to examine whether this misconception of apathy and un-involvement impacts on the efforts of parent involvement by African and African-Caribbean immigrants in Saskatoon as well. This issue of the value placed on parent involvement practices can be better understood using Bourdieu's explanation of cultural capital. Several aspects of cultural capital are considered, namely, educational qualifications, material resources, availability of time, information about the education system and attitude teaching staff.

**Cultural capital.** The lack of cultural capital is a major challenge constraining the involvement of immigrant parents. The work of Blackledge (2001), Crozier and Davies (2007), and Reay (1998a, 1998b), have provided useful analyses in this regard. Bourdieu's work on cultural capital has played an influential role in our understanding of social life generally and more specifically in how the middle class has been able to perpetuate its position of power in society. It has offered valuable insight into the important role that education plays in this process. His theory is applicable to this study as it is used to understand how societal expectations may devalue the parent involvement practices of some cultural groups.

Cultural capital refers to resources that provide access to scarce rewards in a particular area of social life or field (Lareau & Weininger, 2004). The concepts of field and habitus are central to the theory of cultural capital and as such these are outlined as well. Bourdieu used the metaphor of a game to explain social life. Consequently, specific areas of social life were

classified as fields. Each field has its own special resources and hierarchies of prestige and demands a distinctive habitus from its members (Calhoun, 2011). Bourdieu defined habitus as the distinctive tastes, practices and modes of behaviour expected of persons in specific fields or areas of social life. They are neither neutral nor equal but act as yardsticks to measure socially acceptable and valued behaviour and behaviour that is deemed insignificant or unimportant (as cited in Calhoun, Gerteis, Moody, Pfaff & Indermohan, 2002).

Blackledge (2001) and Reay (1998a, 1998b) theorized that the habitus of education are coterminous with that of White middle class parents. Diamond et al. (2006) suggested that this excluded the habitus of other groups such as ethnic minorities, and the working class. Thus, working class, ethnic minority and immigrant parents may not be able to play the roles teachers expect (Crozier, 2007; Crozier & Davies, 2006; Lareau, 1987; Lawson, 2003; Lopez & Vazquez, 2006). Reay (1998a) proposed that cultural capital in education has seven aspects: educational qualifications, material resources, available time, information about the educational system, social confidence, educational knowledge and attitude to teaching staff such as entitlement, assertiveness, aggression or timidity (Reay 1998a, 1998b). Each aspect is explored below.

***Educational qualifications.*** A person's level of education will influence their ability to garner information about the education system and to use the information to effect changes that are to their benefit. Many immigrant parents do not have post-secondary education (Crozier, 2006; Lopez & Vasquez, 2006). The Bangladeshi parents in Crozier's (2006) study and the Mexican parents in López and Vazquez's (2006) study had at most elementary level education. This was compounded by the fact that their education had not been in English. Thus, they had the willingness to assist with the homework the school sent home with children but did not possess the requisite skills to do so. Crozier (2006) asserted that in many instances members of the extended family network, such as an older sibling or cousin, performed these roles. As such the families were activating the social capital they possessed to compensate for their lack of cultural capital. According to Bourdieu social capital refers to a network of relationships between persons in a social group based on reciprocity, mutual obligation and trust (as cited in Granovetter & Swedberg, 2001, p.96-111; see also Putnam, 2000). The parents who did not have the educational qualifications, knowledge of the school system, or material wealth to assist

their children themselves drew on the skills of friends or other family members in an effort to assist their children.

Lawson (2003) posited that there is a relationship between parent involvement and level of education in that low educational attainment can lead to low parent involvement. Parents who have no or little formal education tend to see themselves as unqualified to help and believe it is best if they do not interfere with the teachers' work (Crozier, 1999; Russel, 1991).

The immigrants in Saskatchewan differ from those in the studies conducted in the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Canada has made the recruitment of highly educated and skilled workers a key part of its immigration policy. The government uses a points system to assess economic immigrants (Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Economy, n.d) and those persons with higher levels education are the ones who are most likely to succeed. In 2013 57% of immigrants to Saskatchewan had at least 10 years of schooling and 31% of immigrants had a bachelor's degree or higher (Government of Saskatchewan's Ministry of Economy, n.d.). This would indicate that these immigrants had the literacy skills to assist their children with their academics in at least basic ways, such as reading with them, provided they were fluent in English. However, despite the fact that the immigrants to Saskatoon may be fairly well educated they may not be familiar with how the Canadian education system works. Thus, they may be unable to advise their children about subject choices and how to successfully navigate the school system in Canada.

The various types of cultural capital are connected and in some instances dependent on each other. For example, educational qualifications will impact on material resources by influencing the type of jobs persons are qualified to do and this in turn influences the flexibility of work schedules. These types of capital are explored next.

***Material resources.*** Economic challenges make it difficult for families to become involved in typically teacher sanctioned ways (Lopez, 2001; Lopez, Scribner, Mahitivanichcha, 2001). Many immigrant parents are employed in menial, low paying jobs either because of their low levels of education or because they are not licensed to practice in their host country. The low incomes they receive from these kind of jobs may put access to paid child care services out

of parents' reach thereby preventing them from attending school meetings (Crozier, Davies, Booth & Khatun, 2003; Crozier, 2007). Also the ability of parents to compensate for perceived gaps or inadequacies in the education their children receive is constrained by their income which may not be sufficient for them to employ a tutor. Teachers may attribute children's repeated failure in a subject to parent neglect when parents would be willing to help but do not possess the knowledge to help and cannot afford to pay a tutor to assist.

***Available time.*** Teachers expect parents to volunteer at school and engage in activities such as going on a field trip. However, parents may not have the time to volunteer on the school site since many work in jobs that do not have flexible work schedules or have shifts during unsociable hours. This prevents them from attending meetings or volunteering at school (Crozier & Davies, 2005; Diamond, 1999; Diamond et al., 2006; Doucet, 2011). Limited time because of employment may also prevent parents from assisting with homework and monitoring other aspects of students' school work at home.

***Information about the education system.*** Schools have implicit and explicit expectations of parents based on white middle class values (Crozier & Davies, 2005). Those who lack knowledge of those unspoken expectations are disadvantaged (Crozier & Davies, 2005; López, 2001). Immigrant parents may not be aware of the roles they are expected to play in their children's schooling. For example, teachers place a high value on parents visiting and volunteering at the school. Parents who do not fulfil that expectation are judged as uncaring or neglectful. However, in the culture of some of the countries that these parents originated from, visiting and volunteering at the school is not encouraged and attempts to do so may be interpreted as a lack of confidence in the teacher (Doucet, 2011).

In other instances, parents may not have mastered the soft skills necessary to engender a collaborative relationship with teachers. Doucet (2008) theorized that middle class parents were more proficient than working class parents in this regard. They knew the social rules for interacting with teachers such as praising them (Doucet, 2008). If it is difficult for working class parents who were born and raised in a particular country to exhibit those social skills, then one may surmise that immigrants who are unfamiliar with the culture of the society may face a similar challenge.

Additionally, immigrant parents had limited understanding of acceptable standards of performance, the organizational structure of their children's school and the school curriculum (Crozier, 1999; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; López & Vazquez, 2006). This limited their ability to advise their children and supervise their academic progress. This also prevented parents from determining when their children needed additional instructional assistance from the school and the steps they should take to access such assistance.

Parents with low levels of education and limited understanding of the education system and curriculum are usually less confident than those with higher levels of education and extensive knowledge. Immigrant and working class parents are most likely to fall in the first group. These parents tend to show deference for educators. Some want to see changes but do not know how to put their case across to get results (Carreon et al., 2005; Crozier, 1999). This feeling of powerlessness can cause parents to become uninvolved or confrontational (Lawson, 2003). Also even in instances where immigrant parents have a high level of education the education system in their country of origin may differ from that of the host society and so they may not have the knowledge necessary to help their children to successfully navigate the school system.

In sum, immigrant parents face a range of challenges some of which stem from the fact that educators do not place a high value on their contributions to their children's learning and have ideas of parent involvement that are ethnocentric. Despite not possessing some of the forms of cultural capital that educators recognize, these parents continue to provide motivational resources for their children and to use their social network to make educational decisions that may improve the life chances of their children.

### **Opportunities for Parent Involvement**

There seems to be a need for educators to appreciate the various ways that immigrant parents are already contributing to their children's education. There are also a variety of strategies that schools can pursue to work with immigrant parents and assist them in becoming more involved in the ways that educators expect. These opportunities are discussed in the subsequent sections.

**Strategies educators can employ.** Although educators and immigrant parents seem to have divergent views on what parent involvement entails, some level of consensus about the role teachers and parents will play in children's education is necessary. Various opportunities exist for educators and parents to develop a collegial and collaborative relationship with each other. These opportunities and the strategies that both parents and educators can use to take advantage of them are discussed in this segment.

***School as hub.*** Principals in schools with successful practices for immigrant parent involvement allow the school building to be used to house services that target immigrants (Ladky & Peterson, 2008). These include English as an Additional Language classes and settlement services. This increased the frequency with which immigrant parents visit the school as well as their familiarity and level of comfort doing so. A low level of formal education is common amongst some working class and some immigrant families. If parents express the desire for assistance to improve their language skills school administrators could try to assist in various ways. One way may be to allow their school building to be used as a site where English classes may be held. School administrators will need to determine the resources at their disposal and assistance they could render. they would be able to programs aimed at improving parents' levels of education can improve parent-teacher relationship and enable parents to assist students with homework and reading at home. Lawson's (2003) study of school-family relations in a school that primarily served low income African-American students is instructive in this regard. The parents he interviewed felt that the school should provide additional help to enhance the educational qualifications of families. They suggested services such as helping them to complete their General Educational Development certificate or apprenticeship programs as ways in which the school could improve the relationship with and the level of involvement from parents. This shows that parents expect educators to do more than just teach... they expect them to care, for their children and by extension for them. Lawson's (2003) study suggests that parents feel that for parent involvement to be meaningful and lasting it should emanate from a genuine care and concern for students and their families.

Epstein (2011) reiterates the inevitability of educators contact with families:



However, configured, however strained, families come with their children to school. Even when they do not come in person, families come in children's minds and hearts and in their hopes and dreams. They come with children's problems and promise. Without exception, teachers and administrators have explicit or implicit contact with their students' families every day (p.4).

If Epstein is correct then caring for students must also entail caring for the needs of their families. Educators need to reflect on the purpose and meaning behind parent and family involvement. Is it to get additional funding? To show that one is aware of topical issues in the field of education? To compete against other schools for students? Is it so that parents can utilize their expertise in ways that can improve the educational experience of their own children and those in the wider school population? These questions are critical because they will determine the nature of the involvement activities, their level of intensity and their success.

Research conducted by López et al. (2001) provided support for the notion of the need for an ethic of care to be an important aspect of parent involvement strategies. Their study was conducted in Texas in schools that had a high percentage of migrant families and successful parent involvement programs. They attributed the schools' success to their efforts to make offering psychological support and physical resources to parents a priority. The implications of Lawson's (2003) and López et al. (2001) studies are that parents will become involved in school related learning when theirs and their children's basic needs for food, shelter, clothes and a sense of security and acceptance are fulfilled. Schools will only be aware of the needs of students and their families if they build a relationship with them. Consequently, educators who are serious about involving all parents regardless of whether they are immigrants, their ethnicity, class or other differences need to reach out to families to understand their needs and see how best they can work with them to satisfy those needs. The family-school relationship should be reciprocal. Moll et al. (1992) suggested that learning more about families can be beneficial to educators since they will learn about the expertise that family members possess and use those skills to enrich students' learning experience where possible. Examples of such skills include agricultural, masonry, mechanical skills and so forth. These skills can be utilized to provide experiential learning activities for students (Moll et al., 1992).

López and Vazquez (2006) also suggested strategies such as ensuring that the curriculum is reflective of the culture and experiences of immigrant families, and investing in bilingual textbooks since this will enable parents to better support their children through practices such as assisting with homework. Parents may also be more willing to become involved if they can relate to the content in the subjects that are taught at school. They also encouraged schools to employ the use of translators to enhance parent-teacher communication about children's progress and developments at the school (López & Vazquez, 2006).

***Diversity training for school staff.*** School administrators can offer continual diversity training for staff as a part of professional development activities (Ladky & Peterson, 2008; Pelletier & Corter, 2005). This could be used as an opportunity for parents and other members to share their cultural knowledge with school staff. This would allow staff to learn more about the culture of the families they serve so that they can relate to them appropriately. Additionally, Doucet (2011) suggested that educators should examine family-school relations from the cultural perspective of the parents, or through a 'global lens' (p.2727). She asserted that an in-depth understanding of how immigrant families (including parents) believe they should support children's education would facilitate more effective approaches to bridging the home and school, if parents desired such bridges (Doucet, 2011).

***Official recognition of involvement.*** Schools can provide official commendation for immigrant parents display who exemplary involvement on the school compound (Wong, 2015). This would act as an external motivator for some parents. The recognition could be in the form of a certificate or a post on the school website or some other public commendation of the parents. Aside from the positive psychological effect the parents would have tangible evidence of their community involvement which they could add to their resume for a job or curriculum vitae if they are applying for a scholarship.

***Providing parents with networking opportunities.*** The immigrant parents in Wong's (2015) study volunteered on the school site more than the established or non-immigrant families. These parents volunteered partly to extend their social network and cultivate skills that they could add to their resume. Schools could facilitate networking through hosting social events such as Meet-The Families-Night (Pushor, 2010; Wong, 2015). This would allow families to

become familiar with each other and teachers and establish connections with the school and wider community.

**Strategies parents can employ.** Parent involvement is a collaboration between the parents and educators. Thus parents stand to gain if they respond to the opportunities for them to contribute to their children's education where such opportunities exist. These include opportunities to share their cultural and professional knowledge at the school, and improving their English language proficiency, and assisting with translation for other parents where necessary.

*Sharing cultural and professional knowledge.* In some instances, opportunities exist for parents to share their culture at their children's school. Parents can make use of diversity celebrating events such as school "Culture Nights" to share their language, food, dances and other aspects of culture. Also parents can share their professional expertise with students and teachers. In Ladky's and Peterson's study (2008) a parent with a diploma in computer science assisted teachers in the computer lab and other parents assisted in the schools "Meet the Scientist Day". Parents may choose activities based on their skills and available time to ensure that they make a contribution not only to the education of their own children but the school community as whole.

*Improving English language proficiency.* Some settlement organizations such as The Saskatoon Open Door Society and International Women of Saskatoon provide free English Language courses for newcomers who are not fluent in English. Parents can also make use of these services to improve their ability to communicate with the children and their children's teachers in English. Parents who are bilingual can assist the school by volunteering as translators to enhance communication between the educators and other parents.

## **Conclusion**

This review of related literature has focused on parents' and educators' views on what constitutes appropriate parent involvement in education as well as the challenges and opportunities that exist for immigrant parents who try to become involved. Educators have their views on what parent involvement entails and so do parents. A dialogue is necessary for them to agree on a common set of goals. If schools implement programs without understanding the views and experiences of parents then the strategies will be ineffective (Carreon et al., 2005; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; McKenna & Millen, 2013).

Immigrant parents and parents from other marginalized groups are involved in their children's education in various ways. Their involvement practices range from providing for children's basic needs for food, clothing and general safety to assisting with homework and choosing schools that they think will be most beneficial to their children. Unfortunately, these parents face multiple challenges in playing their role in their children's learning. The most significant challenge is the ethnocentric bias of the traditional educator view of parent involvement and the unwillingness of educators to implement measures to facilitate communication in languages that non-English speakers understand. Some educators view immigrant parents in deficit terms and do not recognize their contributions as valid because they do not always align with the traditional teacher conceptualization of involvement.

However, these challenges can be overcome if both educators and parents are willing to grasp the opportunities that present themselves when schools have students from diverse backgrounds. Educators can make an effort to communicate with parents through use of translators to understand their views and needs as it regards to helping their children to succeed in school. Where necessary parents can make use of resources in the community to improve their language skills and become more competent in assisting their children in the ways schools prescribe. This may be done while continuing with their traditional methods of involvement such as telling stories in the language of their country of origin. This will ensure that students are equipped with the skills necessary to thrive academically in the host society while maintaining their cultural identity.

## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this research was to explore the experience of three immigrant parents with involvement in their children's elementary education. I used the following sub-research question to guide the study:

How are immigrants born in Africa and the Caribbean involved in their children's elementary education?

In this chapter, I outline the philosophical assumptions that underpin my study, explain the methods and the criteria used to select the participants, describe the data collection and analysis procedures, and provide an overview of the ethical principles that guided the research.

### **Social Constructivism**

This research is situated in the social constructivist paradigm which emphasizes the ways in which human beings socially construct reality (Johnson & Christensen, 2014). Human beings create reality through talking with each other, and other interactions that allow them to negotiate meanings together. Lincoln, Lynham and Guba (2011) asserted that constructivism adopts a relativist ontology and a transactional epistemology. In other words, there are multiple realities and knowledge, both of which are constructed by human beings as they interact with each other. For example, immigrant parents see themselves as making a valuable contribution to their children's education (López, 2001). Conversely, some educators regard the contributions of immigrant parents as minimal and lacking (Crozier, 2001). Thus, educators and immigrant parents have different perspectives about the phenomenon of involvement. I wanted to present the reality of the three parents I studied from their own subjective perspectives. That is, to describe how they see themselves contributing to their children's lives and the value they placed on their contributions.

Social constructivism's transactional epistemological stance meant that my participants and I were co-creators of the findings of this research. For instance, during the interviews my participants and I came to a consensus about the meaning of parent involvement in education. The parents shared that they viewed education as encompassing all facets of their children's

development including spiritual, cognitive, physical, social and emotional growth. I accepted their definition as valid. Thus, when they shared stories of activities they engaged in with their children, I probed the stories to get an in depth understanding of their experiences. The final product is the result of oral communication between me and my participants to ensure that what I had written accurately depicted how they saw their involvement with their children's educational growth.

Situating this research in the social constructivist paradigm enabled me to achieve an empathetic understanding of the diverse and unique ways in which the participants were involved in the wholistic development of their children (Creswell, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1998; Willis, 2007). From the individual description of each parent, I presented the commonalities across the experiences of all three parents with involvement in their children's education (Hays & Singh, 2012).

I also noted that several researchers (Burgess, 2003; Norris, 2010; Palmer, 2015; Prytula, 2008) successfully had used the social constructivist paradigm to conduct their phenomenological studies.

### **Transcendental Phenomenology**

I used phenomenology as a research method because it allowed me to gain an in-depth account of the lived experience of my participants as they contributed to their children's education. "Phenomenological research is the study of lived experience" (van Manen, 1997, p.9). Its emphasis is on the *lebenswelt* or the lifeworld of the participants (Hays & Singh, 2012; Matthews, 2002). The lifeworld is "the way a person lives, creates and relates in the world" (Moustakas, 1994, p.48). The ultimate aim in transcendental phenomenology is to explain the essence of a phenomenon for those who have experienced it. The essence of an experience is that quality that defines it and without which it would not be what it is (van Manen, 1997). Put another way, essence is the meanings embedded in the experience of a phenomenon which remains constant whenever the phenomenon occurs, or the invariant meanings of an experience (Moustakas, 1994). I found this focus on attempting to describe and interpret what a lived experience meant for persons first at an individual, and then at a group level, to be compatible

with my goal of unearthing the myriad ways in which each participant supported their children's learning.

The founder of the phenomenological movement, Edmund Husserl proposed that reality had a subjective and an objective component (Moustakas, 1994). His combination of subjective and objective knowledge is found in his concept of intentionality. Intentionality refers to the internal experience of being conscious of something (Moustakas, 1994). It consists of the noema and the noesis. The noesis is not the real object but the phenomenon or how something appears to a person (Moustakas, 1994). The noema is the actual object (Moustakas, 1994). Thus, reality is a combination of the material world and the world as it appears to in the consciousness of the individual. The material world is the environment which exists outside of and independent of the individual. It consists of the natural surroundings such as trees, rivers, animals, as well as man-made objects and structures such as brick houses and cars. Each of these objects or noema may be perceived differently by different individuals. I use the following example to illustrate Husserl's point. When I wait at the bus stop for five minutes when the temperature is 19 degrees Celsius, time seems to pass quickly. However, when I wait at the same bus stop for five minutes when the temperature is -30 degrees Celsius, it feels like I have been waiting a long time because I am cold. My awareness of time (in this example the noesis) changes based on the temperature outside. Time is the noema, it has not changed, however how I experienced time (the noesis) has changed because of my body's reaction to the fluctuation in temperature.

Recall that my goal was to gather descriptions from my participants about the activities they engaged in with their children to support their education. In an effort to understand the lebenswelt of my participants I had to reconcile two phenomenological assertions which, in the first instance, may seem contradictory. The first assertion is that humans may experience the world in different ways (Matthews, 2006). Edmund Husserl (1975) spoke to the subjective nature of human experiences stating that "For me the world is nothing more than what I am aware of and what appears valid in my cognitions...I cannot live, experience, think, value, an act in any world which is not in some sense in me, and derives its meaning and truth from me" (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p.45). The second assertion is that phenomenology's goal "is to describe the universal structures of subjective orientation in the life world" (Eberle, 2014, p.188).

Thus, phenomenologists posit that there are commonalities in the subjective experiences that humans have in the world (Eberle, 2014). How can something be idiosyncratic and universal at the same time? I use the following example from my study to illustrate how I resolved that challenging question. One common type of involvement for my participants was engaging in various bonding activities with their children. However, this common activity of bonding was carried out and experienced in different ways by the parents. For one parent it involved developing a unique language with his children which they spoke together, while another parent bonded with her child by making smoothies with him. Thus, the subjective element is the fact that each parent is choosing an activity based on their own proclivities but the common element is that they are making emotional connections with their children.

As I examined the day- to-day experiences of the parents as they contributed to their children's education I was able to get an empathetic understanding of their life worlds from their individual points of view. In writing the narratives of the parents' experiences I ensured that I included all the activities each parent engaged in even if the activity was unique to him or her. The empathetic understanding I attained allowed me to write an emic explanation of the participants' experiences (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Maxwell, 1998; Moustakas, 1994; Neuman, 1994; Van Den Hoonaard, 2012; Willis, 2007). This emic explanation allowed for the values and perspectives of the participants' voices to be seen in the narratives of their realities.

### **Participants and Participant Selection**

The aim of the study was not to use the findings to make generalizations but to get an in-depth understanding of each participant's life-world. Therefore, gathering data from three participants was sufficient (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 1998; Willis, 2007). According to Lareau (1987) and Doucet (2011) middle class parents tend to be more involved in their children's education in the way educators expect than working class parents. Consequently, my study targeted middle class immigrant parents who were born in Africa or the Caribbean. I used level of education and profession as my two indicators of class. Therefore, persons who worked in a field that required post-secondary educational qualifications or persons who possessed post-secondary educational qualifications were targeted.



I used purposive sampling to select participants for the study. This allowed me to deliberately choose persons who experienced parent involvement in education, were accessible, and willing to share their experiences (Creswell, 2007; Maxwell, 1998). In order to be included in the study participants had to be immigrants from Africa or the Caribbean, middle class, and had a child or children attending elementary school. I approached gatekeepers or persons who had access to immigrant parents with children in elementary school. These included classmates, members of the wider university community, and faith groups in Saskatoon. I was able to choose one of the participants based on recommendations from classmates. The other two were chosen after a gate keeper who I approached to recommend participants for the study volunteered herself and her husband. I was aware of some of the ways in which she was involved based on previous conversations with her and so I decided to include them as participants in anticipation that I would get rich data from them.

### **Establishment of Trust with Participants**

I was open and honest about my goals in the research. This helped the participants to be aware of what the study aimed to achieve and what exactly they were contributing to. I sent typed copies of each participant's interview by email and requested that they inform me if they wanted to revise any aspect of the transcript (Creswell, 2009; Goulding, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Willis, 2007). This enabled them to see that their views or experiences were being recorded accurately. Three participants believed that the transcripts reflected their experiences accurately and so the only revisions I made were those pertaining to grammar. This process of member checking was employed throughout the data collection process. Participants were also given the opportunity to review and correct their individual textual structural analysis and offer any suggestions or changes they deemed necessary (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Steinar, 1996).

### **Method and Tool for Data Collection**

In order to understand participants' experiences, phenomenologists gather lived experience material such as stories and anecdotes as valuable sources of information that can help them to better understand what a particular experience is like for the people who have it (van Manen, 1997).

This research sought to present a detailed description of how immigrant parents defined and carried out their role in their children's education. My assumption was that each parent's experience would be different in some ways since it was based on the subjective way in which each parent conceptualized and carried out his/her role in their children's education (Creswell, 2009; Crotty, 1998; Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Maxwell, 1998; Willis, 2007). Therefore, I used semi-structured interviews to collect data from the participants. This entailed having structured questions to guide the process, followed by open-ended questions that allowed participants to express their definitions, points of view, feelings, experiences and attitudes in their own way, with their own words, and in ways that were meaningful to them (Creswell, 2009; Hays & Singh, 2012; Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Patton, 2002; Siedman, 2006; Steinar, 1996; Van Den Hoonaard, 2012).

Semi-structured interviews were flexible and allowed for the exploration of issues that I did not preconceive prior to the interview (Hays & Singh, 2012; Van Den Hoonaard, 2012). For example, the open-ended nature of the questions allowed parents to express their dissatisfaction with the elementary curriculum and the steps they had taken in response to that. I also noted that researchers such as Burgess (2003), Norris (2010), Palmer (2015), and Prytula (2008) successfully utilized semi-structured interviews to gather data for their phenomenological studies and their work provided useful examples for the development of my interview guide. My interview schedule consisted of nine questions that in addition to asking for background information from the participants, asked them to reflect on and describe how they contributed to their children's education. I asked open-ended questions (Creswell, 2007, 2009; Van Den Hoonaard, 2012) based on my research questions in order to gain a detailed, descriptive account of each participant's parent involvement experience. As suggested by van Manen (1997) I asked participants to give concrete examples of activities they had carried out with their children in the past. I later used these experiences to come to an understanding of how they contributed to their children's education.

**Testing the interview questions.** I conducted a test run of the interview questions in May 2015. The interviewee was a middle class graduate student from Nigeria. He had three children, one of whom was in elementary school in Saskatoon. He provided valuable feedback

on how I could improve the questions. I also revised my questions based on this test run and van Manen's (1997) suggestions for appropriate questions to ask in a phenomenological interview. For example, I had questions on the interview schedule that asked the participant to say what he believed the role of parents in education should be. I omitted that question and all others that asked for the participants' opinions and instead asked questions that asked them to give concrete examples of the actions they engaged in. This was more appropriate for the phenomenological method since phenomenology is the study of concrete, lived experience, emphasizing what actually occurred as opposed to theories about what should.

**Data collection procedure.** Prior to conducting each interview, I set aside any pre-judgements and biases that I had (epoché) so that the research and the research interview were conducted with an unbiased receptive presence (Moustakas, 1994). I engaged in reflective meditation about my own experience with the parents of my past students as well as my experience with my parents' involvement in my education (Moustakas, 1994). I chose to write about these experiences as a part of the process of bracketing my experiences so that they would not interfere with data collection and analysis. I shared one of these written pieces in the first section of the Introduction in Chapter One. The process of reflective bracketing is a practise I maintained throughout the research in an effort to represent my participants' stories in a way that was unbiased.

I conducted two interviews with each participant lasting between 45 minutes to one hour at a location that was quiet, private and convenient to them (Siedman, 2006). I interviewed Bill and Melinda in their home at their request, and I interviewed Kavita in a quiet section of a public library. I conducted the interviews between July 15, 2015 and August 10, 2015. The two interviews for each participant were spaced three days to one week apart to allow participants to reflect on what they had said in the previous interviews and also allowed me the time to construct follow-up questions for the subsequent interview (Siedman, 2006). I recorded the conversations on a tape and transcribed them in preparation for analysis (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012).

I kept a reflexive journal in which I noted my thoughts about the interview process, any relevant information that I felt would help with analysis later, and my thoughts about the topic of

parent involvement generally (Van Den Hoonaard, 2012; Willis, 2007). This journal was not shared with my participants as it contained my unedited thoughts about them and the data collection process, some of which may have been offensive to them. As the journal was kept private I did not let the participants know that I was keeping one.

### **Method of Data Analysis**

Hycner (1985) posited that in a phenomenological study the method of data analysis should be modified to suit the phenomenon being studied (Hycner, 1985). Recall that the goal of this research was to describe how immigrant parents contribute to their children's education. I used a modified version of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen's method of analysis of phenomenological data as outlined by Moustakas (1994) to analyze the information I collected from my participants. The process involved several steps which I outline below.

**Epoché.** The first step I took was to engage in the epoché process. A process that involved reflecting on and removing from my mind any biases, preconceptions or presuppositions about the topic so that the data reflected the participants' meanings and not that of the researcher (Moustakas, 1994). As mentioned earlier I engaged in reflective writing in a notebook and sometimes using Microsoft Word as a means of expressing any preconceptions that I had regarding the topic. I continued this reflective stance in an attempt to prevent my biases from influencing the process of the research. I constantly asked myself whether my analysis truly reflected the participants' stories and compared my statements with the participants' transcripts in an attempt to remain true to the data.

**Phenomenological reduction.** I transcribed the interviews after which I replayed the interview recording several times in order verify that I had transcribed correctly and to develop the gestalt or holistic sense of what is being said (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985). This process was followed by reducing the data to essential statements that best described what participants' experienced. I read the transcript again. During this reading I focused on identifying stories that illustrated the activities participants engaged in with their children and anecdotes of their interactions with their children's school. I used the text highlighter on my computer to highlight the key words or phrases that described the participants' experience. I derived my units of general meaning from the highlighted key words and phrases (Groenewald, 2004; Hycner, 1985; van Manen, 1997). A unit of general meaning is a sentence, phrase, or

word that condenses or encapsulates the essence of what the participants have said (Hycner, 1985). I used the participants' words as much as possible but where necessary I assigned a word or phrase that I felt condensed what was being said in the transcript (Kvale, 1996; Saldaña, 2009). The steps mentioned previously were taken after the first interview and repeated for the second and final interview of each participant. Reading the transcript after the first interview allowed me to construct questions that were guided by the issues the participants deemed to be important. With the new data from the second interview I added and modified units of general meaning as necessary (Hycner, 1985).

After delineating the units of general meaning in each of the three participants' two interviews I wrote individual textural description or summary of what actions each participant engaged in to contribute to their children's education (Hays & Singh, 2012; Hycner, 1985; Moustakas, 1994). The textural description is a detailed account of what the participant experienced (Moustakas, 1994). It "includes thoughts, feelings, examples, ideas situations that portray what comprises an experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p.47). I was able to provide descriptions of the activities using the concrete examples the participants gave to illustrate the actions they performed to assist in their children's educational development. I created a table with four columns, in one column I listed the activities parents engaged in with their children, in the other three columns I wrote the name of each parent. I used a tick to indicate the activities each parent did with their children. This allowed me to see the activities that were performed by all parents and the ones that were not. Using the table and the individual textural descriptions I wrote a composite textural description. The composite textural description is an integration of the summaries of the individual textural descriptions for all the participants (Moustakas, 1994).

**Structural Description.** Moustakas (1994) explains that "the structural description provides a vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience, the themes and qualities that account for "how" feelings and thoughts connected" with the experience under study were awakened and what circumstances evokes it (p.135). The textural descriptions gave me explanations of the types of activities parents were involved in with their children and the process of involvement. My goal was then to reflect on these descriptions in order to understand the circumstances that led the participants to be involved in the way they were. This reflection

allowed me to write a structural description for each participant and then a composite structural description that combined the experience of all the participants. I explain the reflective process I engaged in to arrive at the structural description next.

I thoroughly analyzed the transcripts again seeking to find indicators about the possible reasons why my participants engaged in the types of activities they did with their children. For example, one participant indicated that one way in which he contributed to his daughter's academic growth was by teaching her mathematics. He added that he made a special effort to teach her mathematical concepts even if the teacher was not teaching said concepts in class as yet. Throughout his description of his involvement it was evident that he was very determined that his daughter should excel in mathematics and that he placed special emphasis this subject. In writing the structural description of his involvement, I considered why this father placed this special emphasis on mathematics. After reviewing his transcript, I saw how his Nigerian background was influential since he emphasized how Nigerians placed a lot of focus on mathematics from as early as the elementary level. Thus he was teaching his daughter mathematics topics that he knew she would be learning if she was going to school in Nigeria. I was able to see that his Nigerian background was very influential since if he was from another country, for example Jamaica, where there was not as strong an emphasis on mathematics, he may not have placed so much emphasis on it.

I wrote individual structural descriptions explaining how each participant contributed to their children's education and the meanings they ascribed to their actions. This allowed me to integrate the individual textural description with the structural description to create individual textural structural descriptions for reach participant. The individual structural descriptions were used to create a composite structural description of their experience (Moustakas, 1994). I used a four column table to list the parent's involvement activities, their names, and then used a tick to indicate what activity each parent was involved in with their children.

**Composite Textural-Structural Synthesis.** My final step was to integrate the composite textural and composite structural descriptions, providing a synthesis of the meanings and the essences of the parents' experience of involvement in their children's education (Moustakas, 1994). I wanted to examine the meaning of the experience of involvement in their

children' education for the participants in an effort to explicate the essence of their experience. Thus, I read and reflected on the composite textural structural description several times asking the question what did all the ways in which the parents became involved mean to them? What was the ultimate reason they were involved in the way they were? This reflection on the composite textural structural descriptions allowed me to recognize three themes that explained the goals participants pursued through their various involvement activities in their children's education. These themes were spiritual leadership of children, creating and nurturing relationships, and anticipatory socialization. The transcendental nature of the study required that I identified the essence of the parents' experience. After contemplating all my analysis based on participants' transcripts, the themes, and activities it dawned on me that the essence of all the parents' involvement activities was creating nurturing relationships.

### **Strategies for Trustworthiness**

My study used the four measures of trustworthiness highlighted by Lincoln and Guba (1985) to ensure good qualitative research practises. These are credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. Credibility was achieved by asking participants to review the individual textural structural descriptions to see if the information depicted was truly reflective of how they felt (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). All the participants were satisfied that what was written was an accurate reflection of their experiences.

I have given a 'thick' or detailed description of the participants' backgrounds, and my data collection and analysis methods to assist persons who read the results of the study to ascertain how applicable the findings are to their context (transferability) (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

I guaranteed the dependability of the study by keeping good records of my data collection and analysis procedures. This was done by keeping an audit trail consisting of my reflexive journal, transcriptions, recordings, participant contacts and any other documentation deemed helpful in this regard (Hays & Singh, 2012; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability entailed taking steps to ensure as far as possible that the findings were the result of the experiences and ideas of the informants, rather than the characteristics and preferences of the researcher (Shenton, 2004). I kept a reflexive journal throughout the research

process to ensure that a true picture of the participants' parent involvement experience was presented. This journal formed an important part of my audit trail and provided reminders about the context in which the units of general meaning and theme clusters were developed (Hays & Singh, 2012). The journal allowed me to document my feelings and other information about the data collection process. The other strategies I used to ensure this included declaring my values and my professional background so that readers can assess whether they have influenced the research unduly. As mentioned previously, I also utilized member checking. Participants were invited to review their individual composite-textural synthesis to ensure that it reflected their experiences (Moustakas, 1994). I also asked a faculty member in the College of Education to review the research and provide me with their feedback.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study was conducted within the guidelines of the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans and the University of Saskatchewan's Institutional Review Board. Participants were given a typed letter of invitation outlining the purpose of the research, the methods that will be used to collect information from them, how the data taken from them will be used and stored. This letter also indicated that participants could withdraw at any time during the study and that any information that was collected before participants withdrew would be used in the study. I also explained this information to each participant verbally and clarified any questions they had regarding the research. After they agreed to participate in the study the participants were given a consent form to sign (I have included a copy of the letter of invitation and consent form in Appendices A and B). The data collected from participants during the research process was stored on a password protected laptop and flash drive. After the research is completed the data will be held in a secure place with my thesis supervisor at the University of Saskatchewan for five years.

I used pseudonyms to protect the identity of the participants and ensure anonymity. Some of these participants were known to me and may have felt obligated to help me in carrying out my research. I ensured that I reminded them that they could choose not to participate in the study and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without negative repercussions.



Participants were not given any material compensation for participating in the study. However, they may have benefited from the reflections on the various ways in which they contribute to their children's educational development. This may have led to a greater appreciation for their current actions and could also prompt them to increase the level and type of participation.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I outlined the methodology and methods that I used to investigate the topic of parent involvement in education amongst immigrants who were from Africa and the Caribbean. It was a qualitative study grounded in the social constructivist worldview. I used a phenomenological approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the participants' experience. The data was collected from three participants using semi-structured interviews. Their responses were transcribed and analyzed for themes, which were then used to write a narrative account of how the participants contributed to their children's education. I adhered to the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans throughout the research process.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **Analysis and Interpretation**

In this chapter, I examine the experience of three immigrant parents with involvement in their children's elementary education. I begin with background information about each participant. Following this I explore the themes that emerged as it relates to participants' involvement. Three themes emerged regarding the participants' experience with involvement their children's education: spiritual leadership of children, creating and nurturing relationships, and anticipatory socialization. These themes illustrate how parents maintained good relationships with their children and their children's school, as well as how parents prepared their children for the role their roles in future relationship. I conclude with a summary of the themes discussed.

In an effort to present an emic account of the parents' experiences I chose to use verbatim quotes. These are usually indented and in block format as suggested by American Psychological Association's publication's manual (American Psychological Association, 2012). However, I have used quotation marks to identify the quotes that are less than 40 words and thus not separated from my narration.

### **Introducing the Participants**

#### **Bill**

Bill is a member of the Yoruba tribe from Nigeria. He is currently pursuing a PhD in computer science at a prominent university in western Canada and is self-employed, earning a living as a software developer. He has been living in Canada with his wife and three children, ages eight, five and two and a half, for the past five years. He serves as pastor and men's' group leader in his church. He is also a board member for several other churches. Bill has presented at church parenting workshops and has also published several journal articles on the topic of effective parenting. Growing up in Nigeria, in a Christian household, with a strict father shaped his religious beliefs and gave him a strong appreciation for education. Based on his description of his experience with involvement in his children's education it is apparent that his Christian faith, his parents, the knowledge that he has limited time with his children, and Nigerian culture are the main factors that influence how he assists his children in their educational journey.

**Melinda**

Melinda is a member of the Yoruba tribe in Nigeria. She came to Canada with her husband and two children a little over four years ago. Since migrating to Canada she has had a son. Thus, she now has three children ages eight, five and two and half years. She is involved in her church where she leads Bible study for youths ages six to 11. Melinda completed a master's in engineering at a prominent university in western Canada this spring and is a member of the Saskatchewan Environmental Society which allows her to keep abreast of developments in the area of civil engineering. She has been employed as a youth worker for the past four years which she feels has allowed her to develop her communication skills and her ability to have positive interpersonal relations with Canadians. Melinda balanced being a mother with being a student and working.

**Kavita**

Kavita moved to Canada from Jamaica five years ago to pursue studies in business insurance. She also has a B.Sc. in computer science from a Seventh Day Adventist university in Jamaica. She works as an adjuster for the Government of Saskatchewan. She is married and lives with her husband and her seven year old son. Kavita is an active member of the Seventh Day Adventist church where she serves as an assistant director in the children's ministry. This ministry exposes youths to Christian values and living through Bible study, field trips, arts and craft and other creative activities. As assistant director of the children's ministry she has benefitted from trainings to improve her teaching skills and to learn strategies to enhance the learning experience of the students in the club.

**Spiritual leadership of children.**

The participants' Christian faith played an influential role in the values they taught their children. They wanted their children to know that God exists and to be familiar with the Bible. All three parents were very active in the churches they attended. Bill was a pastor and the leader of a men's group in his church. Melinda, Bill's wife, was a Bible study teacher in the children's ministry in their church. Similarly, Kavita was a Seventh Day Adventist and an associate director in the children's ministry in her church. Melinda believed that her children were

blessings from God. She reflected that she had “a responsibility on their lives and I have a responsibility to God to bring them up in a way that God will be happy with.”

All participants actively worked to develop their children spiritually and to pass on Christian values to them. Bill, for example, indicated that he prayed with his children every night before they went to bed and that he used what I call ‘teachable moments’ in their everyday life and looked “for every opportunity in all their day to day events to look for a principle to bring.” The main values he tried to instill were honesty, hard work, service and perseverance. He explained how he did this in the following excerpt:

We are Christians so the first important value for us is for them to be honest. So we cherish honesty and we teach them that they don’t have to tell lies, that they can trust us, we can handle whatever happens. So we value honesty. And then the other thing that is important for me is to teach them the culture of hard work. So most of the time they want to play and watch TV but I know that you have to work hard in life. So when they ask to watch TV, I say “No TV until after 4 PM because morning time is working time so you work until around 4, 4:30. After 4:30 you have family time, relax time.”

So I put some of those discipline and restrictions on them once in a while to let them know that there is time for everything and you don’t play all the time, there is a time for you to work. So honesty and hard work are important. We also teach them compassion. So opening the door for somebody as a sign of courtesy, learning to respect and honour people that they meet and treating them with dignity, being compassionate. Because I believe that the greatest gifts to give to kids is not necessarily money but the principles that you teach them. So I let them know that they should serve, not to take because it’s a different thing. So many people grow up with a takers mentality so they feel everybody owes them but they are not looking for the opportunity to actually serve people, to contribute to society. So I let them know that they have to work. So that is why we try to involve them in the day to day work, like we are defrosting our freezer because we are moving and water has gathered outside of it, so I asked my eldest daughter to do the mopping because we want them to get involved in working in the home as well. So basically for me those are fundamental for me. Those are the things that I try to teach.

Likewise, Kavita taught her son values she deemed important via her role as volunteer in the children's ministry at her church. She explained how she and the other volunteers did this:

We start with worship, we do some songs, let them do some songs that they like and we let them tell their favourite Bible story and why it's their favourite Bible story.

The way activities are organized in the club allow children to learn other mannerisms such as obedience, respect for others and how to listen. Kavita explained how the club did this:

So in setting like this he knows to listen to what they are saying, follow the rules and observe, you don't do as you please, there are rules you need to follow them. So if it's your time you go where your team is, you do what you are asked, you are not all over the place. We basically teach them, give them instructions and what to do and they listen and follow the instructions.

Kavita also shared that she regulated the television programs her son watched as a means of filtering out programs that could have a deleterious effect on his moral development. She explains how she monitors what her child watches on the television below:

He watches like How is it Made? Planet Earth. He loves to watch Chop Canada on the Food Network. Now he is interested in cooking, so daddy will let him bake with him, cook with him, learn little things... so he likes that. He likes cartoons of course which some of them I limit him but his favourites are Teenage Ninja Turtles and Power Rangers. We allow him to watch those because the others I am not inclined on because they use words that I hate like "Your butt go wild." Other baby programs like Team Umizoomi he still watches, Backyardigans, Mickey Mouse Clubhouse, he watches those that still teaches him stuff.

### **Creating and Nurturing Relationships**

Participants valued their relationships with their children and their relationships with their children's schools. Thus, they focused on cultivating loving relationships with their children and employed various strategies aimed at giving their children a sense of belonging. Participants carefully managed their time carefully so that they could incorporate spending time with their

children into their busy work and school schedules. They also maintained a cooperative and friendly relationship with their children's school. I explore first how parents cultivated a sense of belonging with the children. This is followed by a description of how the parents' communicated and with their children's school and the ways in which they became involved on the school site.

**Cultivating a sense of belonging.** The parenting style of the participants' parents played an influential role in their attempts to bond with their children. Bill and Melinda felt that their parents were not as communicative and affectionate as they would have liked. Melinda shared that she wanted to have an open and free relationship with her children that would include "giving them an opportunity to talk to me at any time." She felt that although her own parents supported her financially up to the university level one short-coming was that "there wasn't so much communication." She wanted to ensure that her children did not feel that way with her. Melinda and Bill wanted to build a relationship with their children based on open communication and an open expression of love.

Bill, for example, stated "The other thing that I also get involved in, which for me is very important is the ability to bond with them." He explains why bonding is so important to him in the following way:

I believe the greatest gift to them is not money but time because time is what we all do not have. If you lose money you can get it back but when you lose time you can't. So time is very valuable and the way we allocate time is the thing that matters most too. So I believe I must create time to create lasting memories for them. So nearly everything that I do for them creates a kind of bonding. So like making sure that before they go to bed, unless I travel I am there to pray for them, and before I pray for them sometimes I read the books they borrow from the public library. So I read for them for like 20 minutes, crack some jokes and then ask them so how did your day go? What did you do today? Just to let them know that they can unwind and relax and share the day's experience together, and then we pray afterward. I make their food when my wife is out and we go for bicycle rides together, I take them for swimming and things like that. When I am going out if I am going somewhere that I know I can take them I will put them in the car and we go out. So for me little things like that creates a memory of a father that is

around. If I am just giving them money and then I am gone before they wake up or I come back when they are already sleeping, they might see my input but they don't really see so those are the things that I think create bonding. And then what I want is for them to feel free to be able to discuss anything with me in life. Because they are girls so I know that later in life they might have personal challenges. So the model of who their husband should look like is me. So I want to create an atmosphere where they feel secure to talk to me and tell me anything without any fear.

He deliberately set aside time in his day to spend with his children, consciously sacrificing other activities to do so. He gives the following reason for making this sacrificial choice:

I think it is just getting your priority right and then also giving up some other lesser important activities. So for us generally we don't usually attend functions. I know people who attend functions all the time. We don't, and we sleep early, sometimes 8 o'clock we are already sleeping. So there are things that we are doing that may not be other people's lifestyle but I don't attend parties, I don't do anything. By 8 PM I am here with my kids because I value the time that I spend with them more. Even when I travel I will ask my wife to give them the phone so I can talk to them and pray with them.

The following statement also indicates the level of thought that he has put into this choice to prioritize bonding time with his children:

There are other things that we do that we give time to, like there are men that like soccer and they will watch Man U, Chelsea... that's like four hours already if they watch those two because each match is about 90 minutes, if it goes to extra it is going to be 120 minutes and they might watch two matches in a day, that's already 4 hours. So I don't have time, I don't have that luxury because a chunk of my time is already going to the kids. I am not saying it's wrong to do those things but you don't necessarily do something because it's right or wrong but because it is the profitable thing. Your life is based on what is profitable, not what is right or wrong. People always say there is nothing wrong but our choices in life are moderated by what is actually aligning with our purpose and our goals in life. So I don't have any issue watching soccer if I have the

time but I don', to sit down for 2, 3 or 4 hours because the time that I didn't spend with my kids is going to something else, so that is the issue, it's priority.

Bill felt that it was important for his children to know that his bond with them was not circumstantial and that he loved them unconditionally. He shared that he ensured that he told his children about the unconditional nature of his affection for them and explained that:

I can motivate them in love to let them know that they can reach all their potential but there are times when they may not measure up, they should not feel bad about it, they should still come home, it doesn't change who they are or how I see them, how I feel about them and so on.

Another example of bonding and friendship between Bill and his children is the fact that they had their own special way of talking which they engaged in sometimes. They called it "Bathroom English". Bill gave an example of this special way of talking:

And then there is a certain way I talk they will say I am talking "Bathroom English". I may just say something like "I am going to clamandose your nose." We call it "Bathroom English", it is our own invention, and you speak garbage. It's just my own way of getting them to laugh. So I will say "Let's brush our nose". So they will say "No, brush your teeth." And I will say "Oh I am sorry, brush your leg." So we get to laugh doing that. And I intentionally just throw it in once in a while to see whether they notice. So for me these are fun, just to know that everything isn't too serious. Because you can just get caught up in life, being so serious that you don't relax and laugh. So for me it's fun, every day I just have fun.

In Melinda's case, balancing her roles as student, employee, and mother was an additional explanation for how she bonded with her children. Due to her studies in the day and her job which required her to work nights, Melinda seemed to have less time to spend engaging in activities with her children solely for recreation however she reported that sometimes she took them to the park and played with them. She also used other activities such as teaching her eldest daughter to improve her presentation skills as an opportunity to give her a sense of acceptance by writing words such as "I am beautiful" for her to recite. Melinda tried to maximize the limited



time that she had with her daughter by multitasking. In giving her daughter positive sentences about herself and her family to rehearse she was improving not just her oral communication skills but also building her self-esteem.

Unlike Bill and Melinda, Kavita indicated that she had a very loving and communicative relationship with her parents and wanted her son to have similar feelings towards her. She explained:

I want him to be able to come and talk to me, I don't want him to feel that he can't talk to us and want to confide in friends because you don't know what they will lead him to. I want him to have that confidence and feel comfortable, our parents did it with us and we want to do it with him.

Kavita ensured that she allocated time to connect with her son in a positive way emotionally. She explained the various ways in which she created a sense of belonging so that her son could feel loved and wanted:

We would put him on the floor and be on the floor with him, if he is crawling, we are on the floor crawling, we would colour together, eat together, if we are baking daddy will hold him and let him hold the mixer and hold his hand, and I have pictures of all of those. If we are mixing drinks, back home it's hot so we do a lot of fruit drinks so we will put the fruits in, cover it and let him press the blender.

She further stated "So if you don't see him and me, you see him and daddy, if you don't see him and daddy you see the three of us together, that's how we roll". I wondered if rearing their children in a new country away from their extended family network contributed to the participants' emphasis on making their children feel accepted. Being an ethnic minority in a new country away from the support of their extended family and friends may have made the parents more sensitive to the need for a sense of community and belonging.

**Communicating with and visiting the school.** The parents were fluent in English and this enabled them to communicate easily with their children's teachers via daily journals, newsletters, and emails. All three participants were satisfied with their relationship with their

children's school. They felt that the schools provided a welcoming and respectful environment for themselves and their children. Bill commented "The teachers are always happy to see you." He described how the school communicated with him as follows:

Usually every day they write in their journal that we use as a medium to exchange correspondence. So they write in the journal every day, I read through it and then I initial it to indicate that I saw it, then if there is anything that I want to tell the teacher or enquire about I write in the journal as well and the teacher will respond. So that is the primary medium. Usually we don't use phone call except if she is not going to school and I need to inform them that she is not coming to school.

He believed this was an effective means of communicating with him and expressed his reason:

Because it allows me to know their day to day activities and what is expected the next day or if there is a deadline for something I will get the reminder. They give us the calendar at the beginning of the term but sometimes we forget what is coming up. So the day to day breakdown helps us to keep abreast of what is coming up.

Melinda's experience regarding communication with the school was also good. She said:

So these schools in Canada, they have a very good structure/system and I wouldn't say there is any kind of like... with teacher and parent there is always a flow and the teacher has a website, so if I want to see pictures of what they did in class, it's there, any questions I am free to ask her.

Likewise, Kavita reported that she had a good relationship with her son's school and described the school staff as "pretty much accommodating" adding that "everything they do they involve us. They send us weekly updates by email about what the kids are doing. We get a newsletter every week."

All three participants also visited the school grounds for various reasons. Bill and Melinda visited the school site at the invitation of school staff for three way conferences, barbeques, talent shows, or other such social activities. However, they rarely visited the school outside of those special occasions unless they had a concern. Melinda had a visited the school

when she had a concern with her daughter. She described an instance when she visited the school site to observe her daughter because she did not seem to be eating the lunch she brought to school:

I was concerned because when she was in grade one, when I packed lunch for her she came home without eating everything. Sometimes she doesn't even eat anything, so it kept going on. I asked the teacher and she said she doesn't supervise during lunch time; someone else does but she makes sure that she goes for lunch. But it kept on happening and I was sad because a child cannot just go to school with breakfast and no lunch, nothing, and she comes home like 4 or 4:30 PM, so it's not healthy. So I just stopped by the school to watch one of their lunch time and I discovered that there was a friend of hers, that takes her that time and because she is a little bit shy, that's when I started noticing that she was really shy, she doesn't know how to tell this friend that "We need to go for recess", she didn't know how to say no. So sometimes she didn't want to. Another reason was she was attending the choir in school then and she didn't know how to structure her time well so that she would go for lunch and at the same time attend the choir. So I had to come home that day and let her know that she had two or three recess so she should plan her time very well, instead of playing in all three, eat your lunch in one, then the second one go for choir practice. So it's good to visit the school, to volunteer to see what's happening. It helps me to know how my child is and after that incident she started eating all her lunch, there was a lot of change.

Kavita also attended the three-way conferences at her son's school. She described that experience thus:

You have something called parent-teacher conference where it's the parents and teacher and student, I guess it's three on one. So we come like twice a year that's when they will tell you his progress. If say for example he got in any trouble in school, they will say he did this and he was trying to help doing that but other than that no they don't really...

They basically show you.... Here in Canada it's similar to the report back home. So they will give you a report, they have it in his portfolio. So at the beginning of the school year

we buy school supplies, including a portfolio that keeps everything he does in that. So they separate them per term and when it's the parent teacher conference they go through it, so they will give you his colouring, his drawings, whatever he wrote and made it's in that. And at that time they will tell you his weaknesses and his strength, what he needs to improve, what recommendations are made etc.

However, Kavita differed from Bill and Melinda in that in addition to attending three way conferences and social events at the school she was also a school volunteer. Thus she was at the school a lot more frequently and assisted the school staff and other parent volunteers with events.

**School and classroom volunteer.** Kavita volunteered at her son's school regularly, providing assistance with various tasks as the school required. She described how she was able to balance volunteering with her job:

As a government worker I get every other Friday off, so you can volunteer and go to his school, spend a morning or afternoon. Usually we save some of our vacations to go on field trips with him. So when we go field trips with the school, if it's my day off I will go and spend the morning, about two or three hours with the teacher in the classroom. And then we will listen to what the kids are doing, do whatever she needs help with.

She described some of the activities she engaged in to assist the teacher in the following excerpt:

The last time I was there by myself I helped the teacher to put the handouts that she was giving the kids for the weekend in the different cubby holes for each child. If any child needs any help writing I will help, if they need any books or whatever they need.

She has volunteered to assist on field trips and described two of the most recent ones she assisted with:

The last one I went to was the zoo. We spent the day with the kids at the zoo and visited most of the animals and then we ended the day with a picnic. That was along busy day because a lot of kids went because they combined two classes. We walked with the teachers, ensure that each child has a buddy partner so you don't lose them. I was assigned four children including my own. So you are responsible for them, if they need

to go to the washroom, get something to eat or wander away you have to make sure you watch that child. So that was pretty much what we did on the field trip.

I also went to the ice rink but I couldn't skate so I didn't go on the ice but just to be there to walk them from the school to the ice rink, we needed more parents for guidance on the road with the kids. So we walked from the school to the ice rink with them, so just to be more of a security, keep them safe on the road and then if you could skate as a parent you would go in with your child. If you couldn't then they are assigned a buddy partner from a higher grade and then that child would take them on the ice rink. The last one they went on was Pike Lake but that was more for excursion, so I didn't go because I had surgery so I couldn't go. And they did a butterfly caterpillar release where they had a caterpillar, watch it until it turned into a butterfly and then they went out and released it into the wild. So those are pretty good stuff that we do.

Additionally, she has assisted with school events such as potlucks, garage sales, bake sales and recycling day aimed at engaging the wider school community. Her role in the potluck is to contribute food however she played a more active role in the garage sale explaining that:

They have garage sale and lots of events. Because my son is in grade one, we don't have a lot that they are involved in yet until they get bigger but like garage sale where you bring donation of clothes, household items, books anything and you come and organize. I was a part of the organization team where I helped to sort the clothes into the different piles and then I was also one of the cashiers. They have recycling day where you carry whatever recycling and you sort them and they are distributed and make money for the school, bake sale day and so forth.

As illustrated above, Kavita was very involved in her child's school. She activated the cultural capital at her disposal (a job with good benefits) in order to contribute to her son's education on the school site.

### **Anticipatory Socialization.**

The parents seemed to be preparing their children for the future, anticipating their off springs' movement through the different developmental stages from childhood into puberty and

eventually adulthood. Many of the activities they engaged in with their children were preparing the children to capitalize on the opportunities provided by schooling and also to prepare them for life generally. In doing so they reinforced what was taught at school by assisting with assignments. Moreover, they positioned themselves as decision makers about what their children learnt at home. Their role as decision-makers about their children learnt is shown in how the parents contributed to their children's schooling by compensating for pedagogic differences between the Canadian elementary curriculum and the curriculums in their countries of origin. They did this by assisting with assignments and teaching skills that they believed would be essential for students and workers in the Information Age. In addition, participants enrolled their children in activities outside of school to broaden their life experiences. They also taught children how to be responsible, which developed their confidence and sense of self-efficacy in anticipation that as their children got older they would be able to do for themselves some of the services parents now performed for them. I explore this theme of anticipatory socialization below.

**Helping with assignments, spelling and reading.** Bill indicated that he dedicated approximately two hours daily to assist with assignments, reading, and spelling practice. He gave the following as an example of how he helped his eldest daughter with assignments:

When she comes back the first thing I ensure is does she have any assignment from school? Usually everyday they give them reading assignment and so on. So the first thing we do is to ensure that she gets her assignment done and I handle that with her. Then because she is going to a French school initially we got tense with "Will she be able to cope?" So I used my experience in computer science to use Google translate to help her through the ability to... so whenever she has a word that she does not know we check Google translate and with that there was significant improvement. Because initially we thought that since we were not French speakers that maybe she would have problems coping but with that I was also able to learn in the process and be able to help her. So homework, then ensuring that she gets ready for school.

By doing this he is reinforcing what is done at school, showing his children that school is important and providing that one on one guidance that can help his daughter to get a better grasp

of concepts in a way that she may not in class where she has to share the teachers' attention with 20 plus other children. Bill also read with his children regularly adding that:

Sometimes they (the school) give them two books a week to read. So like one English, one French. Then at another time they may say read for 15 minutes, not really specific. So at that time we might just read any of the books that they have from the public library. Or they might give them some words to master in French, so during that time we go through all those things so they give them different types of assignment to get them to understand what they are doing.

Although Bill was primarily responsible for assisting with homework, Melinda sometimes helped if there was a specific area she felt her daughter needed special support in. For example, she provided moral support for her eldest daughter and implemented strategies to work on what she perceived as her lack of confidence and weak presentation skills. She shared one instance in which she did this:

My eldest is naturally shy, so I have always been teaching her to speak up. I tell her "When you are talking to someone, look them in the eyes, speak up". So something else I also did was I made her read a poem or something in front of me, to pretend that I am the teacher and the classmates because I didn't want her to be bullied at school, so that helped her because on a few occasions they did a presentation in their class and the teacher said that she did very well in class. So it's part of what I taught her at home. She would not have been outstanding in school if I did not take that initiative, like my child is shy, I need to make sure that she is up and out there.

We did it many times but one occasion, I told her to talk about herself. I wrote some words for her, I said you are beautiful.... I asked her to start with her name, I am beautiful, I have one sister and one brother, my mom is an engineer, my dad is a scientist. She stood in front and said them as if she was presenting to everybody. It was fun, I made her realize that talking to someone is not a bad thing, it's not something that should be stressful, and she should be calm. So we did a lot of practice, about twice. And another thing we did when they asked to talk about an animal for school, she picked the

frog. I got pictures of the frog from the internet. I got out some words about the frog, how the frog is an amphibian and everything about the frog and she presented it to us here before she did at school. So that boosted her confidence a little bit.

Melinda asserted that she felt good when her daughter's report showed that she had improved in her presentation skills. Her proactive stance was evident here in that she identified a situation where she felt her child needed assistance to maximize her performance in school and implemented the necessary measures to effect changes that would be beneficial for her.

Additionally, she assisted her children with reading by taking them to the library every two weeks to borrow books. She read with the children and she also took them to the Pooh Corner where they could listen to storytellers. Since she was only able to go to the library every two weeks she borrowed 10 to 12 books at each visit and then renewed them online. This ensured that the children always had a book to read.

Likewise, Kavita assisted her son with reading and spelling. Kavita has read books to her son since he was a baby. Now that he is older, she still reads with him but also teaches him to pronounce and spell words. The following excerpt gives an example of how she does this:

First of all, we teach him the basics where we teach him how to pronounce words. So we start with his pronunciation of his ABCs so he learns the ABCS, then he puts them together... conjunction, so he's learning how to combine letters to give you words. So we start him with that. If he is with me watching TV and he says mummy what's that word? I will write it down and say let's break the word and we'll break it together, he will grab a piece of paper, in my house we have lots of paper, he will write it. He likes to do stuff like that. So I teach him how to break it.

First we say the word, then I say tell me what letter you hear first and say for example it's mother, he will say mother, "Okay mommy I hear M", I say okay write down M, then I will let him say the word again and tell what other letter he hears and then he writes it down. So we go step by step like that and there are days when he can't be bothered and he will ask me to just tell him the word I will because I can't be bothered.



### **Compensating for pedagogic differences between Canada and participants'**

**countries of origin.** All the participants believed that the Canadian elementary curriculum for the Public and Catholic schools, though commendable, needed to focus more on what they considered should be the core areas of emphasis for their children's education at this level. Melinda and Bill wanted to see more of a focus on Mathematics. Melinda shared her thoughts on her daughter's exposure to Mathematics in Canada, comparing it to Nigeria:

For example, back home, the way I was brought up a child like my eldest would be so good in Mathematics. She would have started to learn lots of Mathematics but in Canada they don't do teaching where they teach the child what they need to learn. They rather do interaction like the child comes up with what s/he wants to learn. But I have overcome that by teaching her myself.

Kavita felt that more emphasis was needed on reading and writing and that the children should be getting more work to do. Kavita shared that:

But at school I don't think they give them enough. I guess I am from the old school and then I am from the Caribbean so our education is different. Here they don't pressure them so it's like you don't want to make them tired. So they don't get a lot of work to do and I think their brains are like sponge so give them work to do. That's my only challenge and here they have taken out reading, writing from the public school so they don't really do handwriting. So I don't think they challenge them enough and it makes them get lazy.

Many of the parents' concerns with the curriculum originated from their views on age-appropriate learning based on their own educational experience in their countries of origin. All participants believed that there were aspects of the education system in their countries of origin (Jamaica and Nigeria) that could be beneficial to their children although they were students in Canada. Likewise, although they no longer lived in their countries of origin they still used their educational experiences as the benchmark to determine what their children should be learning at specific points in their cognitive development.

For example, Bill sought to make up for what he saw as a weak focus on Mathematics in the Saskatchewan elementary curriculum. He opined that:

Maybe different countries place different emphasis because in North America here their major problem is STEM, which is science, technology, engineering and mathematics. So they are weak in all these things. So most of the people who are doing engineering are foreigners or international students. So they are very weak in mathematically related courses and I think the major problem would be that at the early stage their interest in Mathematics is not developed. Because at the early stage people begin to pick interest, they begin to pick what they will do, so that means they have some inclination to what people do in the future or people do in life so they have already begun. If they are exposed to mathematically related course, they will be saying things that doesn't require Mathematics. So I think that is the thing. For us in Nigeria, Mathematics is our strong point because we start from the early stage and it is part of the requirement for admission to most of the universities. Even if you want to do a non-science degree you are required to have some minimum in Mathematics and English. So that makes it and then it is competitive. So maybe you have 1 million people applying for admission to university but only 100,000 will be taken. So 1 out of every 10 so you must work hard. So that is the motivation. So we work on mathematics like almost every day. So I was just concerned that we are in an environment where mathematics is not really emphasized at the early stage so if she wants to do sciences then she needs to develop interest in mathematics.

The participants implemented various measures to address this concern ranging from supplementing the school's teaching with their own, to enrolling the child in a private school with a different curriculum. Bill increased his daughters' exposure to mathematics with his mother-in-law's help. His mother-in-law purchased and posted textbooks used to teach mathematics in Nigeria. He then used the books to teach his daughters topics in Mathematics that they would be learning at their age if they were going to school in Nigeria. An example is the tens and units, which he taught his eldest daughter before they started the topic in school. This has had positive results as he shared in the following excerpt:

And I find it very useful because most of the mathematics that my eldest is now doing in school we have covered it at home. So all her mathematics, she always gets everything because we have covered it at home, and not only that we deal with different ways to solve the problem. So that when they even expose her to one method in school she has an idea of other ways to even achieve the same objective.

Likewise, he explained how he utilized manipulatives to teach his daughter mathematical concepts:

They are still at an elementary stage so they do more of how to do tens and unit. So we look at a different method to measure things, in terms of bunches. So the first thing that we want to do now is I think she had some coins there, some 25 cent coins So I pull out the coins and say so when you have ten of these, let's call it tens, and then if you have 12 tens together and then you pull 10 out, you group them in tens then that's what tens means and then units. And the book that we are using we got from Nigeria, it has a very good visual, because I think they learn more at this stage through visual than another method. So I use that kind of coin analogy because when we were growing up that's the kind of way they used to, nearly everybody in Nigeria is interested in mathematics because of that. So they have bottle covers that you keep at home for counting. So any time you have a mathematics work in your elementary days you just go and bring your counter, that's what you use to know how to count.

Evidently Bill drew on his experience learning mathematics in Nigeria and what he what was considered age appropriate learning in the Nigerian context to inform how he assisted his daughter in the Canadian education system. He felt proud about this particular involvement since his daughter was able to perform exceptionally well in class because of his assistance.

Likewise, Melinda shared that she did not depend on the Saskatchewan school curriculum as a bench mark for what her daughter should know. She reported that:

When I teach my kids I don't think about what they do at school. I think about my country, the way I was grown up, at that age what would she have known? It's good to

know what they are doing in school but I find that their curriculum is very slow for what I want. So anything I feel that at her age I should have known I will just teach her.

She recalled buying a toy clock to teach her daughters to tell the time before it was taught to her at school:

There is a toy I use to teach them the time. I move the hand and it tells you the time. When I first started to teach her she didn't want to do it because she didn't understand it, it was so overwhelming. I didn't know what to do at some point I wanted to give up but then I saw this in the shop and it was quite expensive but I picked it because it will help me to teach her. And so a toy changes the way their learning is because it is fun, I make it fun, it talks and after some time she just wanted to have it all the time. It has helped her to come to like learning time. When I tell her something to do I give her a specific time to do it and if she doesn't understand I will explain. It was tough in the beginning.

I started explaining to them, telling them that there is 24 hours in a day and these 24 hours is divided into 60 minutes. I show them that the tiny, tiny thing there are representing the minutes and the one that is going round is called the second hand. It's going around fast and 60 of it will make one minute. Every 60 seconds there is a change and the time is increasing and when the long hand is on 12 it is an hour, like 1 o'clock, 2 o'clock, and 3 o'clock. I didn't start with the hard ones.

Clearly Melinda played a proactive role in her daughter's education, ensuring that she learnt the content and skills that she believed a girl of her age in Nigeria would have learnt. Teaching her daughter how to read the time was helpful as it enabled her daughter to carry out tasks that Melinda assigned for her to do at a specific time such as making a burger for her younger sibling at 1 PM for lunch.

Kavita chose another option to address what she perceived as the shortcomings of the curriculum that was used to teach her son. She enrolled him in a private Seventh Day Adventist school to correct what she saw as a regression in some areas since he moved to Canada. She shared her reason for transferring her son to the private school below:

When my son came here at age 3 and half, he could spell his entire name, write his name, he could now spell and write my name, daddy's name, he could speak in Spanish and write. He made my penmanship look like crap. Now you have to be teaching him all over again because he is not practicing it. So I really like his school, it's a good family setting and the bigger ones look out for the smaller ones and stuff. They do very well with their French but you are trading off something else and you have to give and take right. What do you want to trade off, I can pay and send him to French class if I want I don't want to trade off his English because in the end English is the main language. He is very good with his French and the private school will teach French at grade four so he will just miss out two years of French. But other than that I really liked the school he was at and if there wasn't that private school I would have left him there. It's very good, it's clean, family oriented, they are good with the kids, they speak French, they plan a lot of family stuff. So if I didn't have that private school I would have left him there and I would recommend that school... I would.

Additionally, she believed that there was an emphasis on play to the detriment of other areas such as reading and writing. She was also critical of how some of the technology used in the classroom prevented children from practicing essential skills such as writing. She explained how the teacher's dependence on the Smartboard was hindering the development of her son's writing skills:

They write but not like how we would let the kids write every day. They use a lot of Smartboards. The teacher put up the information and tell them and all they do is sit and watch. Smartboard, yeah, they do a little handwriting but not as much as we do back home.

Thus, she enrolled her son in a private school to solve some of the issues highlighted above and expressed high expectations of the new school stating that:

We know that our Adventist church has Adventist schools and we know their level of education. We know they have good schools, so we always do research because I went to an Adventist school back home, my husband went to the Adventist university, and my

sister went to the high school. So it's something in our... so we wanted to give it to him since he is in a foreign country and when I checked their curriculum, their curriculum is different from the public sector because they do reading, writing, science. So just as how we had subject days, they have subject days, whereas at the French school there is no set day or hour for Math or spelling. It's just a day and you do whatever, I could be wrong but that's how I felt.

She seemed to be very impressed with the private school which she felt was similar to the schools in Jamaica where she opined "Back home we give them a lot of work" and felt that the new school would do the same commenting in regard to her son that:

He will be very tired. We checked it out. So he will have different subjects to do plus field trips and other activities, so I am hoping what she says is what he will get and I have spoken to other parents and they seem to confirm what the principal said. So we did our research.

Apart from the curriculum, which also featured co-curricular activities such as music, swimming, and taekwondo, she believed that he would benefit from the smaller class sizes at the school sharing that:

It is a smaller size school too so you have more attention. In his grade one the teacher had 23 kids. It was hard dealing with 23 five and six year olds. I have one and I can barely deal with him. So I think one on one is good too. So I like the smaller settings. Some persons may say it will interfere his social aspect in terms of how he deals with conflicts etc. but once you are interacting with people you will always have conflict so you will always learn to deal with conflict. That's how I look at it.

As members of the middle class the participants possessed the financial capital to purchase resources such as books, and computers to enhance their children's learning in the areas they felt the Canadian curriculum was lacking. Kavita noted that she was not very dependent on the school's updates about her son's progress. This was because she and her husband had purchased a copy of the Mathematics, Reading and Phonics books that her son used at school for him to use

at home. They (usually her husband) assigned him work from these books and were able to use his performance on the assigned tasks to judge his progress.

**Teaching new skills.** Bill's Christian faith was influential in his attempt to teach his eldest daughter to write computer programs. This is exemplified in his statement that "Kids they also have some gift that God has put in them but they need somebody to recognize it and take them through the path that they should go in life" Bill goes about setting goals for his children and teaching them the skills to achieve it. One example of a goal he has set is for his eldest daughter to learn simple computer programming before age 10. He asserted:

So one of the goal that I have now is to teach Josephine how to write programs before she is 10. Because in the future knowing how to write programs has been identified as one of the core skills that people will have. So learning programming becomes like another language just like you learn French, your mother language and English. So learning how to code becomes another skill that will be required in the future. So I want to expose her to it before she is 10 because it's been discovered that people who start it early are very good at it. It's just like anything that you give time to you get adapted to it. So I am looking at games because the best way to teach them how to write programs is to introduce them to games that has to do with logical reasoning.

So for example, I have shown her some things about task. There was a time I was writing a small code for her on groceries. So I said assuming that the food that we have in the fridge is finished and we want the computer to tell us when the food is finished. So I told her that first we need to tell the computer all the kinds of food that we have in the fridge. So I created a small database to say we have onion, okra, etc. Then we put in how many of them we have. So what the computer then does, is anytime anybody takes from those items it will minus it from the number of quantities that that thing has. So we want the computer to tell us if anything is finished by just giving us and alert to say "Onion is finished, the last one was taken by this person." So I just wrote a small code and walked her through. To say the first thing we do is this, the second thing is this step by step, because that is what a program is. So I know say can you take off something and then we were just engaging in the process. I want her to get the process of how program

works and then from there she was able to relate with what a computer program does. I was looking at games too that teaches them to engage in problem solving, to say if you want to move from this end to this end what are you going to do?

From Bill's point of view he has a responsibility to use his knowledge and skills to give his daughter a competitive edge by teaching her a skill that is very marketable in the current Information Age. He also shared that teaching his daughter programming would teach her problem solving, which is another skill that could be transferred to other areas of life.

**Teaching responsibility.** The parents believed that it was important to teach their children to be responsible from an early age. In order to achieve this Bill and Melinda assigned chores to their daughters. Melinda pointed out that having a job, studying and being a mother to three young children simultaneously was challenging. She taught her eldest daughter to be responsible by assigning chores to her so that she could exhibit independence and assist with the two younger children. She shared that she explained the importance of being responsible to her daughter in the following way:

I teach them responsibility, my daughter will be 8 next month so I am teaching her that she needs to be responsible for her siblings, to help her mom and dad at home, learn to do chores, be aware that being a big sister takes a lot of responsibility, and that is part of education too.

An important part of the responsibilities Melinda has taught her daughter is how to prepare snacks for herself and her siblings. She described how she taught her eldest daughter to prepare burgers for herself and her siblings:

I told her how to get the burger bread. She knows that when it's in the freezer she needs to microwave it for 35 seconds to make it soft but if it's in the fridge she microwaves for just 15 seconds. She uses the plastic knife, I told her she can only use the plastic knife and cut the burgers into two. She gets the cheese, I told her to place the cheese on the bread, put the burgers on, the ketchup, and make two for herself and two for her sister. For the youngest he will have waffles because he doesn't want burgers, or maybe hotdog. So she does all that by herself without me being there. I showed her how to do it. I



watched her do it maybe 2 or 3 times and she is doing it well. For all of this week she has been doing it. So just teach your child what you want her to learn.

Teaching her daughter to be responsible also allowed Melinda the space to rest when she came home from work and to complete her school assignments since she did not have to do everything for them. This is illustrated in the following example Melinda shared:

This morning I was very tired but all I need to do is just tell her what to do. I have been teaching her that over the time. But these two weeks while her father is away reinforced for me to know that she is very responsible, attentive, and she knows how to do things the way I want it to be done. I give her instructions, “Okay I have put the clothes in the laundry and in the next 30 minutes go check it and dry it. We have to dry it three times so at 10:30 put in the coins and dry, at 11 you check again and dry at 11:30” and she did it and by the time she finished the drying she even brought the clothes in without me saying anything. So if I didn’t train her, she wouldn’t have been able to do it.

Melinda also taught her eldest daughter how be responsible for her personal hygiene, stating that the fact that she worked on shifts meant that sometime she would not be home in time to prepare her daughter for school. Teaching her daughter to these necessary skills assisted her father to prepare her for school in time to meet the school bus. She explained that:

I work the night shift so I had to train her to have a bath by herself. Sometimes dad will assist but I had to teach her to have a bath to wash all the parts of her body and to brush her teeth.

Bill also assigned household chores to his children so that they would learn to have a sense of responsibility and service to whatever group they were a part of stating that:

I think another key thing for me is home training, which has to do with training them to be able to pick up work to do at home. So I distribute tasks that we have at home so that they have a sense that when you are in a place you have a responsibility to ensure that things are cleaned up. So usually I tell them to pick up their toys, I delegate responsibility. Because we want them to grow up with a sense that they need to serve,

they need to be involved in whatever place they are in and to serve the community, not just a sense of entitlement that they have to take. They must put in something that they have. So even though they are still relatively small, I will ask them to pick up the toys, sort the clothes, check the dryer, check the dust bin and so forth. And then we train them how to make their own food for themselves so that they take ownership of taking care of themselves.

Kavita did not assign her son a set chore but encouraged him to clean up after himself if he spilled anything and to put away his toys and books after he used them. She recalled:

So from he was very young (as early as he started walking) if he plays with his toys we told him to put them back when he is finished and that if he didn't pick it up it would go in the garbage. So he learns that if he plays with it, if he moves it, he puts it back. So even before I left Jamaica when he comes in he knows where to put his shoes, he knows he takes his clothes off and he puts it in the dirty clothes in the dirty clothes basket, he knows where to go and find clothes that he puts on in the house. So he knew from a very young age.

Embedded in Kavita's attempt to teach her son to responsible was also the desire to teach him to be empathetic and considerate of others. The following excerpt from her transcript illustrates how she taught her son responsibility and empathy.

If he spills something he wipes it up, if he eats, he takes his plate up from the table. Stuff like that we teach him that we are all in the house, mommy works, daddy works, you go to school, mommy is tired, daddy is tired so we help each other, we work together as a team.

Evidently she is teaching her son that even though he is young he can assist with keeping the house clean by cleaning up after himself and keeping his toys and other belonging in their right place.

**Enrolling children in structured co-curricular activities.** All the participants enrolled their children in structured co-curricular activities to expose them to a variety of enriching life

experiences. They believed these experiences could allow their children to discover and then develop on their talents. Bill also expressed the view that participating in the diverse activities would help to create a memorable childhood for his children. He stated that:

We try to engage them in a lot of activities because we believe that it creates a lasting memory so they are involved in swimming, music, a lot of extracurricular activities. We register them for all the summer camps and so on. They go to the library on Saturdays. So for many parents they wonder how do we get them involved in so many things and it's rare for immigrant parents. So we could have done the barest minimum but we thought it is a worthwhile investment of our time, even though it means we are sacrificing a lot of other things as well but you don't want them to grow up and they miss all the memories that they should have had in their childhood.

All three enrolled their children in swimming, and piano lessons. Additionally, Bill and Melinda enrolled their eldest daughter in dancing, and summer activities such as science fairs. Bill used the science fair to fuel his eldest daughter's interest in that field and describes how he did this:

My daughter just attended science fair at the University and she was so excited. So any time I pick her up from there I will say are you ready to be a scientist now? Are you excited to be a scientist? Because that's the word she has been hearing all the time.

Providing these opportunities for his daughter and facilitating a conversation about careers help her to know that her father has high expectations of her and encourages her to be ambitious and to approach school with a sense of purpose. It also helps her to know that she can set high goals for herself and achieve them. Bill felt that he was fulfilling his God-given responsibility as a parent to expose his children to as many positive influences as possible so that they could activate the talents or latent interests that God had placed in them.

For Melinda, registering the children in these activities served a dual function. It forced her to set aside time in her busy schedule to spend time with them while at the same time they are learning skills and developing talents that could help them in the future. She described her involvement thus:

Another thing that helped me to be consistent was registering in some programs that gives them a particular time in my life. For example, we used to go to the Kindermusic, it is teaching music to children, it's more interaction, have the kids interact with other kids, learning musical instruments and that's the brain is being .... it's made to work with the music, it's not just play alone, so they are learning a lot. So we had a class on Wednesday, so it was a structure, so it held me down to know that yes my kids have that time in my life. So no matter how tired I am when my class finishes I still have to take them there.

Likewise, Kavita enrolled her son in The Adventist children's ministry in which she is an assistant director. She used this as an opportunity to teach and bond with him. Kavita provided an overview of the types of activities they engaged in:

They learn how to be obedient, how to listen, how to be respectful. So how to say please, thank you, excuse me. One of the things we are teaching him at home as well is that if someone is talking you say excuse and wait to be acknowledged, you don't just butt in and start talking, because some of the kids here are like that. So we will say if we are talking say excuse me, wait until we acknowledge you. We teach them Bible verses and songs and stuff like that. We teach them a little drilling where they know how to do left and right turns... how to march like in Boys Scout. So we teach them a little of that, just the basics until they go into the bigger club. We teach them art and craft, colouring. They are too little for the stars but when they go into Pathfinder club itself we learn about stars, how to identify the different stars in the sky. Right now they learn the basics where they learn about chickens, different types of birds, how they look, what they eat, how long they live stuff like that.

We make them rounded we have weeks that we teach them Bible stories, Bible verses, they repeat it and tell us what they think it means. We have weeks where we do art and craft using paper or other things. The other day we used macaroni and let them make soup in a bowl. It's nice, I like working with them.

Kavita also enrolled her son in the YMCA summer program where he also did swimming, art, science and went on nature walks. These activities help children to explore and develop new talents and interests, improve their social skills and confidence. The children also learn to be obedient and do different activities at a specific time, behaviours that reflect the structure and expectations of schools.

## **Synthesis**

In summary, Bill and Melinda were very involved in their children's education. With regards to their eldest daughter, who was the only one of their three children in school at the time the interviews were conducted, much of their contribution to her learning was off the school site. Also, their involvement activities were directed towards their own children and not to the wider school community. Bill shared that he believed he was involved in adequate ways since the nature of the volunteer opportunities at school were feminine and he believed the school required only a small number of volunteers and that need was adequately met by other parents. However, Melinda expressed an interest in volunteering at her daughter's school in the future when she had finished her studies and had more time.

Kavita was also very involved in her son's education. In addition to enrolling him in activities such as Adventurer's Club at church and reading with him at home, she had a very active presence at her son's school where she volunteered in the classroom and assisted with social events such as potlucks, garage and cake sales. She also took the significant decision to enroll her son in a private school to ensure that he received what she viewed as a better education than he would have received in the Catholic school system where he was originally.

Overall the parents' contribution to their children's education was multidimensional encompassing nurturing them as intellectual, spiritual, and social beings. Their involvement was deliberate, planned and purposeful, aimed at ensuring their children have a childhood that is memorable and which helps them to manifest their talents. To this end the parents sacrificed time to ensure that they bonded with their children. They also provided the financial resources their children needed to participate in structured activities such as swimming and music. Their general consensus was that they must invest all the resources they had in their children when they were young because as they grow older and become more independent and open to other

influences it may be too late or more difficult for them to do so. However, if they shaped them now when they are still young then they will grow into adults that they and the society can be proud of.

### **Summary**

In this Chapter, I recounted the three participants' experiences of contributing to their children's educational development in a wholistic way. By this I mean the participants saw their children as cognitive, spiritual, social, emotional, and physical beings. Thus, they engaged in activities that one may not ordinarily directly associate with academic involvement. These activities included instilling values in their children such as respect for others and being compassionate, and teaching them to be responsible. Parents also attended their children's emotional well-being by cultivating a sense of belonging with them. Notably, most of the parents' activities were home-based and only one parent volunteered on the school site.

The participant's contribution to their children's academic growth ranged from preparing children to attend school each morning to being a classroom volunteer. To this end they assisted their children to learn skills or information they felt they were not given sufficient emphasis in the school curriculum. Additionally, parents reinforced what was taught at school by assisting with homework, reading, and spelling. Children were enlisted in activities outside of school which complemented what they learnt in the classroom, as well as helped them to discover and hone their talents. Also, parents maintained a good relationship with teachers and liaised with them regarding their children's progress through parent-teacher conferences, daily journals and emails.

## **CHAPTER FIVE**

### **Discussion, Conclusions, and Implications**

This study aimed to answer the research question: What is the experience of immigrant parents born in Africa and the Caribbean with involvement in their children's elementary education in Saskatoon? I used one sub-research questions to provide further direction for the study:

How are immigrant parents born in Africa and the Caribbean involved their children's elementary education?

In this chapter, I compare my findings in relation to the factors influencing how parents become involved and the type of involvement activities they engage in with that of other studies mentioned in Chapter Two. In the first subsection, I compare the demographic characteristics of the participants in this study with the participants in other studies outlined in Chapter Two. In section two I explore the parents' experience using the three themes: spiritual leadership of children, creating and nurturing relationships, and anticipatory socialization. The third subsection contains the conclusions where I summarize the significant findings of the study and highlight the aspect of the findings which makes the study transcendental: the essence of the participants' experience of involvement in their children's' education. Following this I suggest areas that warrant further investigation as it relates to immigrant parents' involvement in education. Subsequent to this I discuss the implications for theory and provide several recommendations for practice before ending with my reflection on the research process.

#### **Demographic Comparisons**

It is useful here to compare the demographic characteristics of my participants with that of the participants in the studies cited in the literature review. This is because these similarities or differences in demographic traits may help to explain differences in their involvement practices and experiences. Although there were similarities between the participants in this study and participants in the studies I discussed in the review of literature, there were also several differences. Like most of the participants in many of the studies cited in the literature review, my participants were immigrants, they had migrated from developing countries to a developed country, and they belonged to minority ethnic groups. The differences were that the participants

in the studies in the literature review were not fluent in English, usually had a low level of education, and were working class. In contrast, my participants were highly proficient in the English language because they emigrated from countries where English was the official language, they were highly educated, and based on their education and occupations they could be classified as middle class families. It is probable that these factors, in part, account for some of the differences between my findings and those of the studies I consulted. For example, other researchers found that their participants were unable to communicate with school officials because they were not fluent in English. In contrast my participants communicated regularly and effectively with their children's school because they had an excellent command of the English Language.

### **Spiritual Leadership**

All three participants used various means to transmit values to their children. They taught their children Christian ethics such as respect for the God of the Bible, honesty, hard work, responsibility, obedience, perseverance and to serving others. Bill taught his children Christian values through reading the Bible with them and praying with them every day. Also, he and Melinda shared that they looked for every opportunity in their children's day to day activities to teach them a value or principle. Kavita used her position as a teacher and associate director in the children's ministry at her church to teach her son the principles listed above. This finding resonates with the research of Doucet (2011), López and Vazquez (2006), Moll et al., (1992), and Stelmach (2008) who asserted that the immigrant and Aboriginal parents in their studies made a conscious effort to transmit the culture of their countries of origin and ethnic group to their children. Stelmach (2008), López and Vazquez (2006) and Moll et al. (1992) posited that although the parents in their studies did not exhibit the type of behaviours educators deemed as involvement they worked assiduously at home to instill the value of hard work, education and respect for specific their ethnic and national cultures.

Additionally, the 54 Haitian parents in Doucet's (2011) study felt that North American culture was permissive and had a degenerative effect on their children's behavior. They attempted to counter this by keeping school and home life separate and by instilling obedience in their children. The parents consciously maintained a distance between themselves and the school



partly as a means to maintain their cultural identity. While the participants in this study did not seem to be distancing themselves from their children's school, they were aware that there were some differences between their values and some of the values taught by Canadian schools. One example of differences in values is in norms surrounding the parent-child relationship. In Canada children are allowed more freedom to express their views and disagreements to their parents. In the Nigerian and Jamaican culture children are expected to show deference to their parents' views and directives. Thus children are not encouraged to express their views as much as children in North America. What is more an expressive, outspoken child may be lauded as a critical thinker in North America, but may be seen as rude in the Jamaican and Nigerian culture.

### **Creating and Nurturing Relationships**

Participants worked to build loving relationships with their children. They wanted their children to know that they were loved unconditionally and to feel free to speak to them about any topic. Parents also maintained a good relationship with their children's school by visiting the school and through written and oral communication with teachers. I explore first the participants' relationship with their children, followed by their relationship with their children's school below.

**Cultivating a sense of belonging.** The three parents who participated in this study supported their children's emotional well-being in a variety of ways. One parent, Bill, had created a special language with his children that they called "Bathroom English". It was basically talking "nonsense" or using words out of place so that the sentence they formed sounded funny for example saying "I am going to brush my nose" instead of "I am going to brush my hair". He also gave motivational talks to his children expressing his belief in their abilities and his unconditional love for them. Melinda made time despite her busy schedule to take her children to the park and play with them. Likewise, Kavita engaged in activities to make her son feel loved. She played with him, involved him in whatever chores she was doing in the house and just involved him in whatever activities she was doing overall.

The participants' behaviour reinforced the findings of other researchers such as Pinder, Prime and Wilson (2014) whose study of 130 high performing Black American and Black Caribbean students in a mid-Atlantic American state showed that the emotional support the parents provided to their children played an important role in the students' success. Participants

in Pinder, Prime and Wilson's (2014) study conversed with their children about their school day, encouraged them to set goals for themselves, and gave them motivational talks. Similarly, López and Vazquez (2006) investigated parent involvement among 20 Latina/o immigrants in the Midwest. They highlighted how the parents used motivational "consejos" or sage advice to "provide the emotional and cognitive stimuli for children to persevere in school" (p. 24). Likewise, Codjoe's (2007) study of high achieving Black students in Edmonton, Alberta underscored how important parent motivation was to student success. He conducted semi-structured interviews with 12 high performing Black students enrolled in post-secondary institutions in Alberta to investigate what factors contributed to their success. Based on the data collected he theorized that home environment and parent encouragement played a key role in the students' achievements. The parents in his study motivated their children from an early age using various methods such as motivational talks, and teaching them about successful persons in the Black community. This helped these students to develop self-confidence and a positive self-esteem that caused them to aspire to be excellent in their studies and other areas of their lives.

However, unlike Codjoe's (2007) findings, the participants in the present study did not express concern with social discrimination against their children or themselves in the school system. Thus there was no need to offer that kind of emotional support.

**Communicating with and visiting the school.** Educators wanted parents to liaise with them about students' performance and volunteer on the school site as classroom aides and fundraisers (Carreon et al., 2005; Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 1997; Shumow & Harris, 2000). However, some immigrant parents were unable to communicate with teachers and cited language as a barrier to frequent communication with their children's teachers (Carreon et. al, 2005; Crozier, 2005; Delgado-Gaitan, 1990; Doucet, 2011; Lopez, 2001; Martinez & Velazquez, 2000). The parents in the aforesaid studies were not fluent in English and felt fearful about speaking to teachers since they felt their English language skills were poor.

My study deviated from this finding. Language did not pose a challenge to my participants. The participants in my study originated from Nigeria, and Jamaica where English is the official language. Thus they were fluent in English and were able to communicate with their children's teachers in written and oral form. The participants communicated with the school by

attending parents-teachers' conferences where they would speak with their children's teachers about the children's progress in school and the areas of weakness they needed to address. The schools also sent emails and newsletters to the parents to keep them abreast of happenings at the school. Bill also communicated with his daughter's school through a daily journal that his daughter's teacher sent home. This journal contained announcements and also specified whatever materials the children would need for school. Bill read the journal daily and then signed to show that he had read it.

In addition to language, the participants possessed other types of cultural capital in the form of social confidence and educational qualifications. This made communicating with the schools easier for them than the parents studied by other researchers. Also my participants were leaders in their respective churches and so had developed confidence in their written and oral communication skills. They also had a basic understanding of how the education system worked or possessed the skills to find out, and had the financial resources necessary to purchase teaching aides and materials to supplement their children's learning. Lareau's (1987) seminal study highlighted the role that social class and the resources associated with middle class status played in parent involvement. She proposed that middle class parents enjoyed a good relationship with their children's school because they possessed cultural capital. It is possible that my participants' possession of the resources and mannerisms that teachers' value may help to explain the amicable relationship they enjoyed with their children's school. Parents who are not fluent in English may find it challenging to communicate with the school effectively without the use of translators.

Consistent with the findings of researchers such as López and Vazquez (2006), Bill and Melinda visited the school site only when there was an event being held or if they had a concern about their daughter. Like the parents in other studies Crozier and Davies (2005), Diamond (1999), Diamond et al. (2006), and Doucet (2011) two of the parents in my study indicated that their work schedules did not facilitate volunteering at the school. They reported that the field trips and classroom volunteer opportunities were held in the day when they were either at work or coming home from work to rest. López and Vazquez (2006) proposed an additional explanation to explain why immigrant parents were less involved than native middle class

parents in activities on the school site. They theorized that many immigrant parents are not visible on the school site because the school-based activities were general in nature and not concentrated on their particular child or children. I did not see evidence to support that assertion in my study. I believe culture may be a more plausible explanation for the limited school-based involvement exhibited by two of my participants. I discuss how culture may have played a role below.

It is possible that the culture of the home countries plays a role in how parents do and do not get involved. Parents seemed to be able to make time for some activities despite their busy schedules. Bill and Melinda held leadership positions in their church and Melinda had recently joined an environmental association. This indicates that they had made accommodation for some activities. Was their absence from the school site due only to time constraints or was it also because it may not be the norm for parents to be active on the school compound in Nigeria? Based on my experience as a secondary school teacher in Jamaica I know that educators in Jamaica do not usually encourage parents to become involved on the school site in the way Canadian schools do. In the Jamaican school culture parents visit the school at the request of school staff. In Jamaica, educators may invite parents to visit the school for Parent-Teacher meetings, to collect their children's academic report, or when they are summoned because of disciplinary issues pertaining to their child. Cultural and personal beliefs about gender roles may also affect how parents become involved in the school. For example, Bill shared that he believed some of the volunteer opportunities, such as being a field trip aide, were better suited for women than men. He shared that parents who accompanied children on field trips were expected to assist the children in the washroom and with eating and he believed a woman would be better suited for such activities than a man.

Kavita differed from Bill and Melinda in that she volunteered at her son's school as a classroom aide, fundraiser, and she also accompanied his class on field trips. She was able to do this because she worked with the provincial government and was able to get two Fridays in the month off. She used that benefit along with her vacation time to volunteer at the school. The participants in this study were either self-employed or employed in jobs with better benefits than the participants in the studies reviewed in Chapter Two. Therefore, the benefits associated with

the participants' jobs provided certain options that other immigrants employed in low-paying, low status jobs do not enjoy.

### **Anticipatory Socialization**

Participants wanted their children to maximize their potential both in school and also in other settings. As educated professionals they were aware of the knowledge, attitudes and skills that would help their children to succeed. They also wanted their children to explore their talents and to develop good social skills. Thus they engaged in a range of activities to help their children to achieve good grades and to develop the full gamut of their abilities. I examine how participants did this in the subsequent paragraphs.

**Compensating for pedagogic differences between Canada and participants' countries of origin.** The three participants in this study had a very high level of confidence in their ability to assist their children's educational development. They were very active in teaching their children the skills and knowledge that they felt children at their age should have attained. All three parents felt that the Canadian elementary curriculum was lacking in some areas. They expressed the view that the curriculum was more focused on developing children's social skills and on play and not as much emphasis was placed on academics as was the case in their countries of origin. Bill and Melinda, who are from Nigeria, were dissatisfied with their daughter's progress in mathematics. They expressed the belief that she would have been more advanced in Mathematics if she were studying in Nigeria. Thus, Bill acquired books from Nigeria that he used to teach his daughter topics he felt she should be exposed to, even if it meant going ahead of the Canadian curriculum. He was satisfied with the results since teaching her the topics ahead of her teacher allowed her to score excellent marks when said topics were eventually taught in class. Melinda also placed a strong emphasis on mathematics and like Bill taught her daughter Mathematics topics based on the Nigerian curriculum.

Kavita was dissatisfied with the low volume of work her son received. She also felt that he was not given enough practice in reading and writing. She felt that there needed to be more focus on reading, writing and mathematics, and students should be given a lot more work to do. Thus, she enrolled her son in a private Adventist school that used a curriculum that she felt fulfilled those criteria. She expressed the view that her son would be challenged by what she

viewed as the more academically rigorous program at the private school. Academically rigorous, as used here, meant that the children were exposed to significantly larger volumes of reading, writing, and mathematics. The school also had a timetable with set times allocated for the traditional areas of study previously mentioned.

The actions of these parents were similar in some respects to that of the 36 participants in Reay's (1998a) study conducted in one school serving mostly working class families and the other mostly middle class families both located in London, England. Reay (1998a) found the Black mothers in her study were dissatisfied with the absence of Black history in the British National Curriculum and compensated for that by sending their children to Black Saturday School. Similar to Reay's participants, the parents in the current study were proactive and utilized alternative resources to ensure their children received instruction in areas where they felt the school was lacking. They purchased teaching aides such as textbooks or clocks and used their knowledge to teach their children information they felt they needed to know. As mentioned above, Kavita felt it was necessary to conduct research and enroll her son in a private school. She was satisfied that the private school's curriculum would enable her son to acquire the skills she believed he needed at his stage of development.

**Helping with assignments, spelling and reading.** Helping with assignments was one of the involvement activities that teachers in other studies considered to be especially valuable (Shumow & Harris, 2000; Lawson, 2003). All three parents assisted their children with reading and spelling. Bill was responsible for helping his daughter with her day to day homework. However, Melinda assisted with assignments that required her daughter to make oral presentations. She coached her daughter through the presentations at home, giving her suggestions and encouragement to improve her performance. Kavita delegated the task of helping with homework to her husband. However, she read with her son regularly and taught him to spell and pronounce words. This finding was consistent with that of other researchers. Diamond's (1999) study of 10 working class Black parents in the Midwest showed that they supplemented what their children learnt at school by helping them with homework, reading and home work. Codjoe's (2007) findings also showed that the parents in his study assisted their children with homework.

**Enrolling children in structured co-curricular activities.** All the participants enrolled their children in structured activities that they did outside of school. Class may have been a contributing factor. All the participants could be classified as middle class based on profession and educational qualifications. Lareau (1987) noted that middle class parents were more likely than working class parents to enroll their children in structured co-curricular activities. Similar to the middle class parents in Lareau's (1987) study, my participants enrolled their children in "formal socialization activities" such as swimming, music, arts and craft, ballet (Lareau, 1987, p.81). The parents in this study enrolled their children in activities to give them exposure to different environments and skills, as well as to develop their confidence and social skills. They believed that exposing their children to a variety of activities would allow them to discover and develop their talents, skills, and stimulate their interests in possible career paths.

Bill and Melinda registered their daughter in music lessons, dance, swimming, and summer science fairs. Bill expressed the view that he enrolled his daughter in a science fair partly as a means of nurturing an interest in the sciences, whether to become a doctor, an engineer or a similar profession. Melinda shared that she anticipated the co-curricular activities would make her daughter a more confident person. Kavita enrolled her son in the children's ministry at her church, music lessons and the YMCA summer program. She expected that her son's social skills would be developed as he took part in the programs.

## **Conclusions**

Upon reflection on the experience of involvement for the three participants it is evident that the essence of their parent involvement experience is creating nurturing relationships. Parents guided their children into creating a relationship with God, then they created an open loving and communicative relationship with their children, they worked to create cooperative relationships with their children's schools through communicating the teachers, and volunteer activity. Participants also worked to prepare their children to fulfil their roles in they would need to play in future relationship both inside and outside of the classroom.

Several other conclusions can be drawn based on the experiences of the participants in this study. First, social class played a critical role in how the parents were involved in their children's education. The participants' middle class status meant they possessed the education

and confidence to assist their children with school-work and the financial resources to enroll them in co-curricular activities. All participants were professionals and had pursued tertiary level studies in Canada. Their experience with postsecondary education equipped them with the knowledge to plan for their children's education beyond the elementary level. Participants were aware of the attitude and attributes that are necessary for persons to advance in the professional arena. Thus, from an early age they motivated their children to consider career choices and enrolled them in activities that would develop their confidence, expose them to different experiences, and prepare them to successfully navigate first the school system and later the professional sphere.

Second, participants' high level of English proficiency was also influential in allowing them to communicate with school staff and assist their children with school work at home. They were fluent in English and this enabled them to assist with reading and assignments, and communicate with teachers in a way that was clear and understandable.

Third, parents were very deliberate in their involvement practices and ensured that they led to the wholistic development of their children. Thus they were not only concerned with their children's academic growth but also with the improvement of their spirits and their emotions. To this end, participants engaged in activities that were directly related to improving grades such as helping with spelling and mathematics. They also engaged in other activities which are not as directly related to schooling such as playing with their children and spending time bonding with them.

Fourth, parents also seemed to be straddling two worlds. They lived in Canada and their children were students in the Canadian education system. However, they used the standards of their home countries to determine acceptable learning outcomes for their children. All participants employed various intervention strategies to ensure their children's competency in writing and mathematics was comparable to students of the same age "back home" (that is, their country of origin).

Fifth, participants desire to build open, expressive relationship with their children was based on the type of relationship participants had with their own parents. Two participants were trying to show the kind of affection to their children that they wished their parents had shown to



them. On the other hand, one participant had enjoyed an affectionate relationship with her parents and tried to replicate that kind of rapport with her son.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

My research has provided a glimpse into the lives of three immigrant parents as they guided and supported their children through the elementary education system in Canada. I have come to the end of the process of investigation with more knowledge than when I began. However, the process has also revealed some information that caused me to reflect on possible areas that could be explored in future studies. These possible areas for future research include:

- How does class interact with ethnicity, nationality in regard to parent involvement?
- An exploration of how refugee families become involved as compared to immigrant families. Refugees enter Canada under different circumstances than immigrants. Refugees are forced to flee their countries of origin and may come to Canada with very little financial resources and have less social capital at their disposal than immigrants. Many refugees also suffer from emotional trauma. It is important to understand how these variables influence their involvement in their children's education.
- In what way, if any, does children's gender influence how parents become involved in their education?
- What is the experience of step-parents or parents in reconstituted families with involvement in their children's education? This would seek to find out if parents who are not biological parents have more challenges or if they find supporting their children's education less gratifying than biological parents.

### **Implications for Theory**

López and Vazquez theorized that the immigrant parents in their study were less interested in involvement activities that were not directly connected to their children. Based on the experiences of two of my participants I can concur with this. Two of my participants' involvement activities were home-based and centered on their own children's development as opposed to the wider school community. However, I believe more attention needs to be given to how differences in cultural norms influence the involvement practices of immigrant parents. Investigating cultural views about parents' role in education can provide some insight into the low visibility of immigrant parents on the school site.

The findings of this research indicate that the participants' possession of cultural capital in the form of education, financial resources, and social confidence played an influential role in how they became involved in their children's education. It seems to imply that there are variations in how immigrant parent become involved based on the level of cultural capital they possess.

### **Recommendations for Practice**

Parents possess much knowledge about their children, professions, culture and other areas that are valuable resources for their children and the school community as a whole. Thus, Educators will reap benefits if they reach out to individual parents on a one on one basis and invite them to become involved. Parents may not respond to public invitations via email or a letter because they believe other parents will respond and there is not a need specifically for their help. If their children's classroom teachers made a direct appeal to them and explained how this would be beneficial to their children it may be more convincing than the mass email.

Schools can suggest to parents ways in which they can work volunteering on the school site into their schedules. A suggestion such as using vacation time to volunteer at school is something that some parents may not have considered. One strategy could involve making flyers to give parents strategies they can employ to make time to be involved in more ways including on the school site.

Another approach to reaching out to immigrant parents could involve encouraging parents from similar cultural groups to recruit other parents from their cultural community as volunteers for the school.

Finally, educators should investigate and utilize opportunities to socialize and develop relationships with parents off the school site. This would involve attending cultural and community events to better understand diverse cultures and to build rapport with parents and community members.

### **Reflection**

I believe I could have approached choosing the participants differently. Initially there were four participants to the study. However, reviewing his transcripts one participant was dissatisfied with

how he had portrayed himself and chose to opt out of the study. I believe I should have interviewed more people than I needed to ensure that I still had the sample size I was aiming for. Also during the period that I was writing the bulk of Chapter Four and Chapter Five of the research sometimes I would receive insights in moments when I was going about my daily routine. Sometimes I was on the bus, or running an errand while pondering the data and I would get some deeper understanding of something a participant had said. I wasn't always able to record these insights and in retrospect I could have recorded the thoughts using the voice recorder on my phone until I was able to write them down.

Completing this research has been a transformative and challenging process. I have had to exercise patience and perseverance throughout the course of writing. I wrestled with my data, my thoughts, emotions, wondering why I had chosen to go the more difficult route of a thesis-based masters. However, I feel a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment now that I have completed. There were many times during the process of writing that I feared that I did not know how to express what I had in my head in a way that was academic and impressive. I sat before my computer willing my thoughts to flow from inside of me unto the screen in beautiful prose. Deep down there was a perpetual angst, nudging, discomfort, an intuition that I had something meaningful and valuable to express... if only I knew how. I have discovered that writing is difficult. In the periods of writer's block, I found solace in the work of Glesne (2011), and Van den Hoonaard (2012) who reminded me that writing is rewriting and that all writing begins with a deficient first draft. I was thus able to allow myself to write freely and produce material that I then winnowed and smoothed, chiseled, and formed until it expressed the ideas and the stories of my participants in a way that honoured the precious vignettes of their experiences they had been gracious enough to share. Williams and Bizup (2014) offered practical advice on the technicalities of academic writing. I also found that reading the theses of other researchers who had employed the phenomenological method was very helpful. The theses of Burgess (2003), Norris (2010), Palmer (2015), and Prytula (2008) were particularly instructive in this regard providing a framework and a roadmap that I could use to get my bearings and chart a direction for my own study.

The participants' desire to pass on their faith to their children reminds of one of my mother's contribution to my educational development. Here I can relate to the parents who were teaching their children about God. My mother, though not an overly pious woman, ensured that she sent us to church and that we knew that God is real. The most important factor that allowed me to finish this thesis was my Christian faith. This faith has been the sustaining force when I have persevered through the difficult times in my life. This faith that she taught us was not a visible involvement activity to my teachers in the past and is not visible to my professors now, but it is at the core of who I am and has enabled me to persist throughout all my studies. This reinforces the fact that so much of what parents contribute to their children's education is invisible, difficult to measure and appreciate in the short term but still very valuable.

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## **Appendix A**

### Introductory Letter to Participants

## **Introductory Letter to Interview Participants**

### **Parental Involvement among Four Immigrants of African and African Caribbean Descent**

Dear Parent,

My name is Alleson Mason. I am pursuing a Master's Degree in Educational Administration. My research interests are parental involvement in education amongst immigrants and cultural diversity and parental involvement.

I am conducting an investigation into the ways in which African and African -Caribbean immigrants contribute to their children's education and the challenges they encounter when they become involved. African and African -Caribbean parents who are immigrants, have children in elementary school and who have completed a college degree are ideal participants for this study.

I will conduct face to face, one-to-one semi-structured interviews with individual parents. All information collected during interviews will be confidential. The interviews will be recorded on a tape recorder and subsequently transcribed. The research will be approved by The University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Sciences Research.

Participation in this research is voluntary and I will ensure that your privacy is preserved by using pseudonyms. Participants are free to withdraw at any time without any negative repercussions. However, all data gathered from participants before withdrawal will be used in the study. Should you decide to participate in the study you will be given transcripts of all interviews conducted with you to review and revise until it reflects your views.

Thank you for considering this request and I look forward to hearing from you. You may contact me via email at [masonalleson@yahoo.com](mailto:masonalleson@yahoo.com) or by telephone at (306) 230-0758.

Sincerely,

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Alleson Mason



## **Appendix B**

### Letter of Consent for Interview Participants

## **Letter of Consent for Interview Participants**

**Title of Study:** Parent Involvement in Education amongst African and African- Caribbean Immigrants in Saskatoon

Supervisors: Dr. David Burgess and Dr. Janet Mola Okoko

Department: Educational Administration

Researcher: Alleson Mason, for M.Ed. Admin, University of Saskatchewan,  
aam026@mail.usask.ca

**Purpose of Study:** This study aims to address the need for more information about immigrant parents' contribution to their children's education. It will investigate the parent involvement experience of four immigrant parents and describe how the parents contribute to their children's education at the elementary level and the challenges they face in becoming involved.

**Procedures of the Study:** I will conduct three semi-structured interviews with four participants, each lasting approximately one hour. These interviews will be conducted at a time and place that is convenient to you. The interview will be tape recorded and subsequently transcribed.

**Risks of the Study:** I will transcribe the interviews. I will use pseudonyms to protect your privacy. I will allow you to review and revise all the transcripts of interviews conducted with you until you are satisfied that they reflect your views. There are no known risks to participating in this study.

**Storage of Data:** The information collected from you will be stored safely with Dr. David Burgess at the Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan for five years according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

**Withdrawal:** You are free to discontinue your participation in this study at any time with no negative repercussions. Your right to withdraw from the study will apply until data has been pooled, de-identified. After this it is possible that some form of research dissemination will have already occurred and it may not be possible to withdraw your data.

**Dissemination of Results:** The results of this thesis will be used as a part of the requirements for a Master's Degree in Educational Administration. The results may form a part of the presentation at a conference or be published in a scholarly journal.

**Questions:** Should you have any questions regarding this research you may contact me at aam026@mail.usask.ca, or my supervisors Dr. David Burgess (306-966-7612), and Dr. Janet Mola Okoko (306-966-7611) Department of Educational Administration, College of Education, University of Saskatchewan. This research has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office (966-306-2975). Out of town participants may call toll free (888-966-2975).

I \_\_\_\_\_ understand that this research project has been approved by The University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioral Science, on \_\_\_\_\_ and I agree to participate. I am aware of the nature of the study and understand what is expected of me.

_____	_____	_____
Participant's Name	Participant's Signature	Researcher Signature
_____		
Date		

## **Appendix C**

### **Application for Approval of Research Protocol**

## APPLICATION FOR APPROVAL OF RESEARCH PROTOCOL

To: University of Saskatchewan Advisory Committee on Ethics in Behavioural Science Research

### **1. Name of Researcher and Related Department**

#### **1. Graduate Advisors**

**Dr. David Burgess**

**Dr. Janet Okoko**

**Department of Educational Administration**

**University of Saskatchewan**

#### **1a. Student Researcher:**

**Alleson Mason**

**Masters of Education Program**

**Department of Educational Administration**

**University of Saskatchewan**

#### **1b. Anticipated Start Date: March 2015**

Anticipated Completion Date: June 31, 2015

### **2. Title of Study: Parental Involvement in Education amongst African and African-Caribbean Immigrants in Saskatoon**

#### **3. Abstract:**

The purpose of this study is to use a phenomenological approach to explore the experiences of four immigrant parents of African and African-Caribbean origin with parental involvement. Semi-structured interviews will be used to gain better understanding of the various ways that immigrant parents contribute to their children's education. Four questions will guide this study: How do immigrant parents view their role in their children's education? How do immigrant parents contribute to their children's education? What challenges and opportunities exist for immigrant parents who become engaged in their children's education? Semi-structured interviews will be used to collect information from each participant.

#### **4. Funding: None**

#### **5. Participants:**

Participants will consist of African and African-Caribbean immigrants who have children in elementary school. These participants will be chosen using the snowball method. The researcher will ask participants to refer other parents living in Saskatoon who they consider to be ideal for the study.

**6. Consent:**

The researcher will follow the guidelines of the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans and the University of Saskatchewan's Institutional Review Board. Each participant will be given a written consent form explaining the purpose of study and how the information will be used. The form will also indicate that participation in the study is on a voluntary basis and that participants can withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions.

**7. Methods/Procedures:**

The researcher will utilize qualitative methods to explore the participants' experience with parental engagement in their children's education. Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with each participant. Participants will be advised that their participation is voluntary and they can withdraw at any time with no negative repercussions. The interviews will be audio taped and transcribed. Interviews will be analyzed to identify themes, subsequently a narrative will be created to explain the themes that are common to all the participants' experiences with parental engagement in their children's education.

**8. Storage of Data:**

After the data has been analyzed the information collected from you will be stored safely with Dr. David Burgess at the Department of Educational Administration, University of Saskatchewan for five years upon completion of the study according to the University of Saskatchewan guidelines.

**9. Dissemination of Results:**

The results of this thesis will be used as a part of the requirements for a Master's Degree in Educational Administration. The results form a part of the presentation at a conference or be published in a scholarly journal. Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of participants at all times.

10. **Risk or Deception:**

There is no risk to participants and deception will not be employed in this research. All participants will be informed of the purposes of the study and how the information will be used. Participation will be on a voluntary basis and they will be given the opportunity to review the transcripts pertaining to their own interviews.

11. **Confidentiality:**

Pseudonyms will be used to protect the identity of all participants and for the schools their children attend.

12. **Data/ Transcript Release:**

The participants will be given typed transcripts of their individual interviews to review and revise until they are satisfied that it reflects their views. They will be given a Data/ Transcript Release Form to sign which will indicate that the transcripts are an accurate reflection of their views.

13. **Debriefing and Feedback:**

Participants will be given a summary of the results of the study upon request.

14. **Required Signatures**

Applicant:

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Alleson Mason

Student Researcher

Advisors:

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Dr. David Burgess

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Dr. Janet Okoko

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Department Head: Dr. David Burgess



**Appendix D**  
Interview Guide

# **Parental Involvement among African and African-Caribbean Immigrants Parents in Saskatoon**

## **Interview Guide**

1. Please tell me about your background
  - Ethnicity
  - Education
  - Professional qualifications
  - Community involvement (religious, neighbourhood group)
  - How long you have been in Canada?
2. Please describe how you get involved in your children's education:
  - At home
  - At school
  - In any other environment
3. Think back to your earliest memory of being involved in your children's education.  
Explain what you did, how you did it and how engaging in the activity made you feel.
4. Can you share another specific instance when you assisted your child to learn?  
Describe what you did being as specific and detailed as possible.
5. What opportunities exist at your children's school for you to become involved?
6. Can you describe a situation when your children's school made it difficult for you to participate in their education? What did they do and how did you feel at the time?
7. How would you describe your relationship with your children's school?
  - Communication
  - Involvement
8. What challenges do you face in the process of being involved in your children's education?
9. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your involvement in your children's education?